University of Alberta

Building Positive School Culture:
The Principal's Journey

by

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Abstract

This study concluded that principals paid attention to five areas in building school culture: student achievement and performance; student discipline; programs, traditions and celebrations; human resources; and operational management. The foundation of the school culture was a vision for student success that was student-centered, required team and empowerment, involved trust, caring, equality, and commitment and passion by everyone.

This study also concluded the tools for building culture that were key to the success experienced by the principals, were the language they used and the relationships they built. The language in their communication with others needed to be inclusive, inviting, and supportive to ensure that people felt ownership of the culture. Principals needed to be mindful and respectful in the relationships they developed with everyone in the school.

The third conclusion in this study was that building school culture is a complex and multi-dimensional process that requires study and analysis. Some strategies principals' employed in building school cultures included: problem-solving; targeting priorities; planning strategically and having an understanding that 'timing' of decisions was critical; inspiring others to join them; asking questions and challenging beliefs; standing for something (moral purpose); being vigilant and mindful of people, their communication and the relationships; constantly examining and reexamining; involving and empowering people; being courageous; building team; finding required resources; being tough-minded; being creative; protecting what needed protecting; being committed and passionate;

being willing to spend the time that was needed; believing that what they were doing was the most important work they could be doing.

Recommendations for practice and theory included discussing a framework that outlines key components in establishing school culture. Another recommendation was that education programs provide opportunities for principals to examine their language patterns and belief systems as these are key in building relationships. It was also recommended that principal education programs involve some kind of mentorship or internship program where aspiring leaders have an opportunity to explore the theoretical aspects of building school culture; and have an opportunity to 'live' the experience so that they may determine if they wish to do the work needed in a principalship.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

"Parents, teachers, principals, and students have always sensed something special, yet undefined, about their schools—something extremely powerful but difficult to describe. This ephemeral, taken-for-granted aspect of schools has been frequently overlooked and consequently is usually absent from discussions about school improvement" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p.2). The importance of culture in a successful organization has been a basic tenet in the business world for some time. It has not, however, been given the same attention in the field of education. "In business, the connection between culture and performance is commonly accepted. In schools, where the product is complex and intangible, a strong cohesive culture is even more important than in business" (Deal, 1987, cited in Sashkin and Walberg, 1993, p. 12). Some researchers argue that school culture is "actually one of the most significant features of any educational enterprise. Culture influences everything that goes on in schools: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, the practice of instruction, and the emphasis given student and faculty learning" (Peterson and Deal, 1998, p. 28).

Despite the importance that culture plays in an organization, many of the reform and improvement initiatives that have taken place in education in the past three decades have emphasized goals and outcome based learning; standards and standardized assessments; restructuring—centralized vs decentralized or site-based management; magnet schools and/or schools of choice. One could argue that many of these factors are part of what helps create school culture; however, Rossman, Corbett and Firestone (1988) argue that these reforms emphasize what they term technical and political perspectives as opposed to a cultural perspective. "The technical perspective emphasizes a rational approach to improving professional practice and rests on the assumption that increased knowledge and technical assistance produce change; that is, teachers will accept a well-designed product that can be shown to improve instruction" (p. 2). On the other hand, the political perspective indicates that change is not that simple. It "assumes that teachers, administrators and others have interests that sometimes diverge and that all parties use the power and influence at their disposal to shape new programs" (p. 2). In their study of three high schools, Rossman, Corbett and Firestone (1988) emphasized a third, often ignored aspect, the cultural perspective. They argued that:

> the acceptance of improvement projects at the building level and the 'effectiveness' of that school depend in profound ways on the existing school culture. The introduction of planned change challenges the status quo and instigates staff members to compare their current cultural content with that embedded in the new activity. Staff members respond to the innovation according to how well the proposed changes fit with the culture in terms of what is good and true. That being the case, it is critical to understand not only the dynamics by which school cultures shape initiatives toward change but also the normative content of these cultures, how malleable they are, and how cultural definitions of acceptable and valued behavior are distributed within the school. (pp. 2,3)

As a practicing school principal, it has always been my belief that the cultural aspects of a school are often the most important factors in both the effectiveness of the school and in initiating any change or improvement. I also believe that the principal is a critical player in the development of that school culture.

Research Interest

This nebulous concept called 'culture', 'climate' or 'ethos' has fascinated me for years. It has been different in each school where I have taught or been a principal and it is different in the schools of my colleagues. One of my basic tenets as an educator is that building a positive school culture is critical to school effectiveness, to student and staff well-being and to student and staff performance. School change and improvement is an extremely complex issue and building the right climate for change as well as building a culture that sustains change is critical to the success of the school. I am interested in what other school principals think about the culture in their schools and the journey they experienced in the process of building that culture.

Purpose of this Study

Like Rossman, Corbett and Firestone (1988), I believe that building a positive school culture is a critical step in school improvement and effectiveness. The research on effective schools done in the late 1970's and the early 1980's showed that an environment conducive to learning and a purposeful culture with a clear mission and high expectations existed in schools that were effective (Levine and Lezotte, 1990). "These studies provided vivid proof of the power of culture" in schools (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 5). In more recent studies (Fullan, 1998; Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988), culture was seen as critical to the successful improvement in schools. "In study after study, where the culture did not support and encourage reform, that improvement did not occur" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 5).

In a longitudinal study comparing two schools with similar populations, McLaughlin (1995) found that the most effective of the two schools was a place of passion, cohesion, commitment and extensive collaboration and interaction amongst the teachers. In other words, it had a positive, focused culture. A five-year study by Newmann and Associates (1996) found that schools were successful if their primary focus was teaching and learning; they were committed to high expectations; they had social support for innovation; and teachers worked collaboratively and maintained professional dialogue with each other. These schools had an "ethos of caring, sharing, and mutual help among staff, and between staff and students, based on respect, trust and shared power relations among staff" (Newmann and Associates, 1996, p. 289). Building this kind of school culture is a challenging and somewhat daunting task where one size does not fit all and where many factors are at play.

In my research, by interviewing principals, I examined from a principal's perspective how they built their school's culture and what their role was in that process. As James and Connelly (2000) indicate "research literature on school improvement is helpful in pointing to factors that may make a school effective. It is however perhaps less helpful in giving insights into the journey which represents the improvement/change process and in indicating how to enable that process to take place" (p. 41).

With all this research indicating the importance of school culture in bringing about improvement, why have we not paid more attention to this aspect of school life? Bolman and Deal (1997) argue that people tend to respond to situations in one of four ways by using one of four "frames". The first frame, the human resource frame, focuses on the skills and needs of people and the necessity of a trusting and caring environment. The second frame, the structural frame, focuses on goals, policies, and the hierarchy of command, results and efficiencies. The third frame, the political frame, emphasizes power, conflict, negotiations, compromise, and the management of scarce resources. The fourth frame, the symbolic frame, places an emphasis on meaning, symbols, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and other forms in which faith and hope can be transmitted.

Any one or another of these frames may be more dominant in schools at any given time depending on the influences from the political and economic arenas. The first three frames are evident in schools most of the time; but the fourth frame, the "symbolic" is often seen as unnecessary or as superficial. Many aspects of school culture would be identified under the fourth frame. That is why I believe it is important to revisit the importance of this aspect of a school's life, as in many ways it is the true life of the school.

Many researchers both in educational literature and business research have identified leadership as critical in building both effective schools and effective businesses. "One of the most significant roles of leaders (and of leadership) is the creation, encouragement, and refinement of the symbols and symbolic activity [building culture] that give meaning to the organization" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 10). Pondy (1976) believes that an effective leader makes actions meaningful to others. Schein (1985) says that "there is a possibility underemphasized in leadership research, that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with culture" (p. 2). I believe this is a critical role for principals and that successful principals in successful schools do this and do it well. I also believe that many principals are not aware of what they do. Are they able to do what they do because of some inborn "talent" or ability to lead or do they act on some form of tacit knowledge? Is talent involved in how tacit knowledge is created that makes these principals more successful than others? Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) make a distinction between "explicit" knowledge and "tacit" knowledge. Explicit knowledge includes things like words and numbers that can be seen and communicated. Tacit knowledge is:

> highly personal and hard to formalize, making it difficult to communicate or share with others. Subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches fall into this category of knowledge…tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in an individual's action and experience, as well as in the ideals, values or emotions that he or she embraces" (p. 8).

How all this knowledge is put together or constructed and then utilized would be as unique as a person's fingerprint.

One task in knowledge creation then becomes how to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. This research was an attempt to do that on the topic of building positive school culture.

I believe, as General Powell advocates, that people are born with talent. When asked in an interview for *Industry Week* whether leadership is instinctive or can be learned, General Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret.) former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, White House National Security Advisor, and current Secretary of State said:

> I think leadership can be shaped. You have to have some fundamental instincts for working with people. But that instinct can be improved upon through training and education, so that you understand what works for you. In my career I've come across people who were terrible leaders because they had no gut instinct for leadership and no amount of training

> helped them. I've also come across brilliant and natural leaders who become even better when they developed their skills. (p. 56)

I would hope that my research would lead to a better understanding of what principals do in building a positive school culture and what leadership qualities facilitate this process. I was not sure the results would lead to substantiating the talent aspect of leadership, but they might add to what is known about leadership skills in effective principals. I was also interested in the roadblocks these principals face(d) and what they learned and would do differently. Learning from mistakes is part of knowledge creation. It was also interesting to see what these principals thought were the key factors or elements in their particular school's culture.

Definitions

Culture

For the purposes of this study the following definition of culture will be used: "a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems…that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1985, p. 9).

Principal

For the purposes of this study the following definition of principal from the Province of Alberta's *School Act* (1999) will be used:

> (m)"principal" means a teacher designated as a principal or acting principal under this Act

Section 15 of the Act states:

> A principal of a school must
>
> (a) provide instructional leadership in the school;
>
> (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized to this Act;
>
> (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
>
> (c.1) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;
>
> (d) direct the management of the school;
>
> (e) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board;
>
> (f) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;
>
> (g) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;
>
> (h) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;
>
> (i) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board.
>
> 1988 cS-3.1 s15;1994 c29 s7
>
> (p. 22)

Assumptions

For the purposes of this research, it is assumed that the way principals build schools with positive cultures is a process that can become better understood through the semi-structured interview process. Another assumption is that what is said by the principals in the interview is a true understanding and reflection as they see it. I also assume that the constructivist paradigm, with its ontological and epistemological assumptions, would form the methodological and philosophical base for this research.

Limitations

Six school principals were interviewed to collect data to inform this research. These six principals were chosen in a discussion between their superintendents and the researcher. The decision for selection was influenced by the superintendents' constructs of school culture, the evidence they have to support their construct and the researcher's knowledge of the participants' work in their schools.

I interpreted the data subjectively, through my own constructions. The interpretation of the data was to create a new construction in and of itself, and was influenced by my previous constructions while I concentrated every effort to maintain the integrity of the data. The interviews with the principals helped create new constructions for both of us as the hermeneutical/dialectical process proceeded (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Only through the process of bringing varying constructs into juxtaposition are we able to examine them in terms of fit, whether they work and whether they should continue to inform us or be changed into something more informed and sophisticated—i.e. "new knowledge."

Because schools are often a microcosm of society, changes within society may create changes in schools. What was once considered important for a positive culture in a school may change with changing times and context.

Delimitations

This study was confined to investigating the ways principals build positive school culture. The six participants in the study were identified by their superintendents because they have or have had schools with positive school cultures. They were also chosen because of their willingness to participate and their interest in the research. The purpose of the study was to understand how principals build positive cultures and to employ consensus among the principals to construct a model that might be used to assist others in building positive cultures in their schools. By examining how successful principals made changes and built cultures, a "how to" model may become apparent as the data was examined for common themes.

The participants were at various stages in their educational careers, including one participant who recently retired after a long and successful career as an educator. All participants had been principals in schools within the last ten years.

Research Question

The research was guided by the following question: How do principals build positive cultures in their schools? The following questions were included in the interview guide or were sub-questions in the study:

1. What is school culture and how critical is it in a school? Why?
2. What is required for a school to have a positive school culture?
3. Describe the culture of your school.

4. How did this culture come to be? What role did you play as a principal in creating this culture and what strategies, steps, and actions did you take in its development?
5. What roadblocks did you face? How did you deal with these roadblocks?
6. What factors contributed to your success? What leadership strengths contributed to your success?
7. What have you learned and what would you do differently if given it to do over?
8. What leadership qualities do you think principals need the most to build schools with positive school cultures today?
9. How did you involve parents, staff, students and community in developing the culture of your school?
10. Can anybody do what you did? What would they need to do it?
11. What inspires you and what motivates you?
12. What is your personal view on education and how does it translate into the culture of your school?
13. If you were to pick one single factor that would most influence the culture of a school, what would that be?
14. What events and circumstances in a typical school day make you feel good and what make you feel bad? What keeps you going when times get tough?
15. How much time do you spend in your school in a given week? Does it require a lot of extra time for you, your staff and others to build the right climate? What would your school be like if these extra efforts were not made?

Significance of the Study

Defining school culture has been a topic of some debate in the literature, and is, perhaps, one of the limiting factors in examining culture in relation to school improvement and reform. Geertz (1973) defines culture as a web of significance in which we all live. Bower (1966) defines it more simply as the way we do things around here. Others identify it as the shared beliefs and values that bring a community together (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). As early as 1932, Waller spoke of schools as having distinct and different cultures. "There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores and irrational sanctions, a moral code" (p. 103).

With the many attempts to define culture came the debate of what term to use when referring to this 'something' that seems to be in each school. The terms 'culture', 'climate', and 'ethos' are, in fact, used interchangeably in the literature. Sashkin and Walberg (1993) agree that "one cannot see culture therefore it is hard to define, nebulous, but (it is) definitely there" (p. 6). Anyone who has spent time in schools, especially in different schools has experienced this.

In the late eighties and nineties much of the research and literature relating to education and schools examined the issue of school effectiveness and school change. In the United States, media sparked much alarm as they reported on studies such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education Report, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform* (1983). Many public schools in America were reported as having very poor student achievement and high numbers of students dropping out before completing high school. Post-secondary institutions and public and business sectors were complaining that students were graduating with few skills. The general public was left with the impression (and perhaps rightly so) that public schools were in serious trouble.

These problems were not exclusive to America. Countries like England and Canada were also very much concerned with the effectiveness of their schools. As our world became more global, reports were again provided in the media about how schools in the western hemisphere were doing in relation to European and Asian schools. Despite the fact that these analyses did not compare apples to apples, the general public was once again left with the impression that western public schooling was below standard and that our children, compared to children in other parts of the world, would have less of a chance in the new global society.

From the research on school effectiveness came the natural question of "How do we improve public schools and make them more effective?" Thus began the many studies on school change and improvement. As researchers began examining what makes schools effective, one area that came into focus was that of school leadership. It appeared that the leadership of the principal was a significant factor in changing the school to be more effective (Yukl, 1994). It was also found that the culture of a school was greatly influenced by the principal and was significant in determining the success or failure of a school improvement plan (James and Connelly, 2000). "School improvement strategies usually fail if they do not directly address the distinctive culture or ethos that is to be found in each school, which profoundly affects pupil motivation and achievement" (p. 43). It appears that leadership and culture are still important aspects to study in our schools.

Within the last decade a new dimension has been added to the challenge of creating an effective school. This was the involvement of parent and community groups and the change in power that some groups have been given. Parental and community involvement in schools has increased with many schools being required by law to establish a School Council consisting of parent and community members whose job is to provide assistance and feedback to the principal. In some ways this has made our schools more accountable and more transparent, at least, to those who choose to become involved. It has also added to or at least enlarged a dimension of the culture of a school.

It can be argued that parents have always been involved in schools, but with the advent of the School Council and the power it has been granted, parents became an influential group that the principal must consider when attempting to change or improve the school. Changes or improvements can certainly be made easier with the support of the School Council as they have the potential to influence parents as well as publicly elected officials. I was interested in how other principals have managed this aspect in building their school cultures.

With the increased emphasis on school effectiveness and improvement we have also seen a variety of organizational changes within schools as well as a change in the variety of schools. Schools of choice, charter schools, magnet schools, career cluster schools, and alternative schools are, among other things, ways that communities and educators have responded to this need for improvement in our schools. In some school districts these schools operate under the mandate of public education but have a specific focus with regard to their mission and culture.

The addition of these types of schools, coupled with an open boundaries concept can allow for students and parents to choose a school. This works out well if the right student goes to the right school for the right reasons. It has been argued that this also creates an environment of competition amongst schools. I would argue that competition amongst schools has always been there from the inception of private and public schooling. It has certainly become worse since the public started receiving lists of schools ranked according to achievement results. These rankings do not account for any differences in socio-economic conditions of the populations attending schools.

Given that we seem to be experiencing an ever-increasing competitive environment in public education with the growing belief that some schools are better than others, it would seem that continuing to examine why this happens is critical. Part of that examination should include studying the cultures and the leadership in successful schools to determine what factors in the areas of leadership and culture have helped create this success.

Summary

This first chapter introduced the purpose of the study along with research interest, the research question/subquestions, definitions, limitations, assumptions and the delimitations. It is an important study because understanding school culture is central to the work principals do as well as to the effectiveness of our schools. Research on school culture has been recently preempted by a more narrow focus on student achievement and performance. This is not to say that student achievement and performance are not important. In fact, it is the critical work we do in our schools. However, school culture is about how we live in our schools, how we relate, how we view schooling in general. If schools are positive, dynamic, safe places where people work with commitment and passion, student achievement will improve.

Leadership in our schools is and will remain critical to the culture of the school and the success of the school. With declining numbers of people interested in and/or trained for the principalship, it is important to examine the work they do in the hope that the knowledge can be used to mentor, teach and inspire others. When it is done and done well it can be very rewarding. When you help create an environment where people (teachers, students and parents) want to belong, where it is fun and filled with purposeful work, then you have done a good thing!

The next chapter will survey the literature in the areas of school effectiveness and improvement, change, culture, culture formation and change, school culture and organizational and educational leadership. This literature review will provide a backdrop to the life of a principal.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In reviewing the literature, the following topics were explored in order to build a framework for this study:

- School Effectiveness
- School Improvement
- Change
- Culture
- Culture Formation and Change
- School Culture
- Organizational Leadership
- Educational Leadership

School Effectiveness

The examination of school effectiveness really began in the early sixties when many human rights groups were questioning the issues of equality in society. James and Connelly (2000) argue that the school effectiveness wave began with the "unequal society" and the concern "for equality of educational opportunity in the 1960's that prompted the first two major systematic studies of school effects entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman et al., 1966) and *Inequality: A Reassessment of Family and Schooling in America* (Jencks et al., 1972)" (p. 3). It seemed that more affluent children were doing better than less affluent children and that 'public schooling' was for poor students and 'private schooling' was for the affluent.

It was hoped that, through some form of school restructuring, the deep social and racial divisions that existed in society would be addressed. Coleman (1966) and Jencks (1972) however drew the conclusion, that if greater equality were to be achieved, it would have to happen outside of schools instead of within (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001). It was believed, however, schools had a part to play and that schools could become more egalitarian and could make an impact on the impoverished and disadvantaged communities. "That was the message of the Plowden Report of 1967 with its promise of educational priority areas to tackle disadvantage at its roots" (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001, p. 4).

However, some argue "the 1970's have been characterized as an era of betrayal by the educational establishment, an establishment which put equality before quality and, self-indulgently, lowered rather than raised expectations of working-class children" (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001, p. 4). It must be mentioned that massive social change was also taking place in society during the seventies and that it would be easy to blame the educational system for not correcting the problems of the day. As MacBeath and Mortimore (2001) argue, the scale of social transformation taking place during this time presented schools and teachers with challenges of such proportion as never seen before. In the 1980's things only got worse in terms of social transformation

> all the socially progressive movements saw education as the key to their goals. Environmentalism took hold, and superficially at least, curricula began to reflect pro-environment values. The movement to desegregate people with disabilities saw the integrated classroom as its most important strategic goal. As less restricted immigration created what seemed to be a tide of new races and cultures, schools were the designated site of socialization for newcomers' children and often for newcomers themselves....Women entered the workforce in increasing numbers; new schools incorporated daycare spaces and after-school daycare programs

> for latch-key children appeared. Teachers began to attend workshops on how to respond to the unique needs of children from single-parent families. (Barlow and Robertson, 1994, p. 6)

This shift from schools being part of the solution by promoting pro-social values to being the sole solution to preventing social collapse was significant during the mid 1980's. "Schools were to accomplish the impossible by treating everyone as an individual identical to all other individuals" (Barlow and Robertson, 1994, p. 7). Schools could no longer group students by aptitude because it might reflect social class more than ability. "Inequities of gender, social class, innate or acquired ability, effort and circumstance were to be vanquished" (Barlow and Robertson, 1994, p. 7). These ever-increasing demands on the classroom teacher for individual care and attention to the needs of the child, above and beyond educating them, created a heavy burden for education and for teachers. Some have argued we took on more than just teaching—we became social workers, dispensers of medication and counselors. Yet, despite all this, "Equality of educational opportunity is what schools continue to strive for, even as the gap between the richest and the poorest, privileged and underprivileged continues to widen. [But] Equality is a fragile concept" (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001, p. 5) and one not easily attainted.

Since its inception in North America, the mandate of public education was to be the stanchion of equality. Public education has been the one institution that provided what many immigrants come to North America for—HOPE. Hope for a better life. Hope that even if you were born poor, you might one day be rich. If one stays in school, gets a good education, then one should do well in life.

This means that the opportunity to learn must be provided to all children by both those working within and those working without our schools. It means always striving to make our schools more effective. It, in effect, means that this entrance to the 'good life' must not continue to be restricted by issues of race and socio-economic status. To assist in this (as this is a bigger social issue, schools can only do part), we must continue to examine what we are doing in our schools and must avoid the development of a "culture of mediocrity" and continue to foster a "culture of hope" in our schools. To do this we must ensure a school culture where we always examine what we are doing and why we are doing it.

Research in the area of school effectiveness has produced volumes of work about what it takes for a school to be effective. "A 1997 review by Bosker and Scherens of seminal studies (those meeting specific methodological criteria) listed 719 factors that had been found to be associated with effectiveness" (cited in MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001, p. 7). In a meta-analysis, Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995) reduced these to eleven factors:

1. Professional leadership
   - firm and purposeful
   - a participative approach
   - the leading professional
2. Shared vision and goals
   - unity of purpose
   - consistency of practice
   - collegiality and collaboration
3. A learning environment
   - an orderly atmosphere
   - an attractive working environment
4. Concentration on learning and teaching
   - maximization of learning time
   - academic emphasis
   - focus on achievement
5. High expectations
   - high expectations for everyone

  - communicating expectations
  - providing intellectual challenge
6. Positive reinforcement
  - clear and fair discipline
  - feedback
  - recognition programs
7. Monitoring progress
  - monitoring pupil performance
  - evaluating school performance
8. Pupil rights and responsibilities
  - expectations clearly communicated
  - high pupil self-esteem
  - positions of responsibility
  - control of work
9. Purposeful teaching
  - efficient organizations
  - clarity of purpose
  - structured lessons
  - adaptive and collaborative practice
10. A learning organization
  - school-based staff development
  - (attendance at appropriate external training courses)
11. Home-school partnership
  - parental and community involvement

(cited in James and Connelly, 2000, p. 40)

In a 1996 study on school effectiveness, Stoll and Fink describe how the Halton Effective Schools Project task force grouped these eleven factors into three broad categories:

- *A common mission*: a shared and communicated vision of school goals and priorities. The principal plays a major role in the encouragement of teachers', parents', and pupils' involvement in, commitment to and responsibility for the vision.
- *An emphasis on learning*: characterized by teachers who have and convey high expectations to their students. Teachers also use a variety of teaching and monitoring strategies, and work together to create curriculum materials linked to the school goals.
- *A climate conducive to learning*: where morale and self-concept are high, due to active involvement and responsibility on the part of students, recognition and incentives, and fairness and consistency with regard to student behavior. The learning environment is attractive, with work displays and attention paid to comfort. It is also inviting to parents and members of the community, who are also involved in school life. (p. 16)

MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed (1997) concur with these results, indicating that there are three core characteristics of effective schools: high quality professional leadership and management, a focus on teaching and learning, and the development of a learning culture where the staff are engaged in their own learning as well as that of students by participating in an appropriate staff development program.

Although these features of effective schools have been identified, it has been argued in the literature, however, that it would be a mistake to identify an ineffective school as a school lacking in these features. "We have not given sufficient attention to the possibility that ineffective schools are driven by factors still to be explained and with an internal dynamic still to be unraveled" (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001 p. 8). For example, most research agrees that "teacher effects are powerful and that they are not limited to the time period which pupils spend with that particular teacher" (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001, p. 10). Often the influence of an effective primary school teacher will linger into secondary levels of schooling (Sammons et al., 1994). It has also been found that children experience schools differently and that their performance differs at different times in their school careers (Sammons et al., 1998).

This 1998 study also found that the longer children stayed in school, the more social class influenced them. It seems that many factors are at play in the effectiveness as well as the ineffectiveness of schools. In a review of recent research, Gillborn and Gipps (1998, cited in MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001) found that more research needs to be done to understand the internal cultures of schools, how this culture works and how it interacts and connects within itself and with the outside world. Identifying factors of school effectiveness is useful but not enough in and of itself.

School Improvement

"The research literature is very helpful in pointing to the factors that may make a school effective. It is however perhaps less helpful in giving insights into the journey which represents the improvement/change process and in indicating how to enable that process to take place" (James and Connelly, 2000, p. 41). van Velzan, et al. (1985) analyzed the research findings on school improvement into a comprehensive definition of school improvement that has been widely accepted. School improvement is "a systematic, sustained effort aimed at a change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively" (p. 48). A useful analysis of this definition was provided in the University of London Institute of Education School Improvement Network's Bulletin—*Research Matters* (1994, p. 1-2):

Systematic

- needs to be carefully planned and managed
- involves change in organization
- must be built into daily activity
- must be monitored and evaluated

Sustained

- must go beyond the initial drive
- must be built upon over time as change is a process

- must become part of a school's natural behavior
- must involve a plan for future continuance
- must persist

Effort

- requires cooperation and commitment from staff
- requires recognition that things will not go smoothly and that turbulence is part of the change process
- results in conflicts during the change process
- significant changes require significant energy and sacrifices

Change

- need for ownership
- need for change recognized by major stakeholders
- need for involvement at all stages of change—identification of need, initiation, implementation, institutionalization and continuation
- ensure it is an improvement not just a change

Learning conditions

- may require a series of changes or many innovations
- the conditions that support learning must be a focus for change

Other related internal conditions

- goes beyond teaching-learning activities to include the overall culture of the school
- will fail if they do not directly address the distinctive culture in each school

- recognize that culture profoundly affects pupil motivation and achievement

In one or more schools

- internal and external collaboration with other educators is important
- look for support from local authorities, post secondary institutions or external consultants

Ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively

- requires a range of goals that will enhance student learning, achievement and overall development

Unfortunately in today's world school improvement has been focused on increasing student achievement, specifically test scores. Stoll and Fink (1996) indicate that school improvement must go beyond this and include overall pupil progress and development along with achievement. They believe that a school with the following practices will not only initiate improvement, but will also sustain it:

- has enhancement of student outcomes as a primary goal
- has set a clear focus on tasks of learning and teaching
- manages change
- sets and limits its own direction
- evaluates its current culture
- has positive cultural norms
- has a strategic plan to achieve goals
- pays attention to internal conditions that enhance change
- maintains improvement even when conditions are not favorable

- monitors and evaluates change processes, student achievement, and progress of improvement plan

In their book *Shaping School Culture*, Deal and Peterson (1999) argue that there is "widespread consensus that America's schools need improvement" (p.10). They also believe that schools should act more like businesses and that "the human side of good [business] organizations might be worth emulating" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 11). Their one reason for this argument is that:

> *Top businesses have a shared culture.* A successful company's culture pumps meaning, passion, and purpose into the enterprise. Company leaders know that success flourishes only when people are committed, believe in the organization, and take pride in their work. These places of work become beloved institutions where people pour their heart and soul into everyday ritual and routine" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 11).

Therefore our schools should develop a shared culture where staff, students and parents are committed to the shared purpose of improving student progress, development and achievement. I believe that passion and commitment are two important and defining characteristics in bringing about improvement and change and that the principals I interview will demonstrate this passion and commitment.

Change

Change is all around us, within us and is happening all the time. It can take place with or without our awareness. It can be as simple as doing something differently or as complex as doing something differently. The complexity depends on the who, what, why and how of the change and the significance of the change.

> Change is complex because it is inextricably linked to our emotions. Imposed change can call up a whole range of emotions: anger at the imposition and the denial of personal autonomy, sorrow at the sense of loss of the old, and anxiety at the uncertainties that the new will bring….Anxiety is likely to be the dominant emotion in the management of both imposed and self-initiated change….[thus] the management of these non-rational responses to change, especially anxiety, is crucial in change management. (James and Connelly, 2000, pp.16, 17)

James and Connelly (2000) argue that "schools are organizations built for the management of change…[because] the central purpose…is to manage learning. To learn is to change, hence the role of schools in managing change" (p. 17). They further argue that because change, learning and emotions are linked, schools are places where the management of emotions is important. This management of emotion is often accomplished through the establishment of expectations, well-established routines and practices both in and out of the classroom. These frameworks help contain the emotions associated with learning. When curriculum is changed or a new teaching method is required, a new set of routines must be put in place to manage the emotions that result from these changes. This takes time and a willingness to learn, but it can cause anxiety.

Because knowledge and authority are linked, teachers often see their authority as teachers impaired when they are required to implement something new—especially if it is something they have little knowledge about—thus compounding the anxiety. For example, the implementation of the use of technology, specifically computers, into the teaching/learning paradigm caused some inflation in anxiety for teachers and students alike—some more so than others. But, with time and training, most teachers were able to establish new routines and new knowledge thereby feeling less anxious and more in control.

"So in educational change, there is both change in the process and change in the way in which we manage (consciously and unconsciously) the emotional dimension of the process in the classroom" (James and Connolly, 2000, p. 18). This is made worse because most change needed to improve achievement requires risk. Often as educators we would rather stay with what is tried and true (after all it worked for us) even though it continues to produce the same mediocre results.

The research on educational change and management is extensive; however, Morrison (1998) has attempted to identify the following main themes:

- Change is structural and systemic

  -meaningful change will affect all aspects of the system and will be complex
- Change is a process that occurs over time

  -it is not linear nor sequential
- Change is multidimensional

  -includes factors such as resources, processes, leadership, management, knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs
- Change is viewed differently by individuals and requires a range of responses

  -it is experienced both at the personal and institutional levels
- Change management requires investment in resources—technological and human and management of the process

  -it requires creativity and problem solving abilities
- Change strategies must be flexible, adaptive and emerge over time

  -it requires engagement of all levels

People respond to change in a variety of ways—some accept it, some stay neutral and wait to be convinced that it will work and some resist it. Conner (1995) identifies several reasons why people resist change:

- Lack of trust. Some people don't trust those who are trying to make changes while others don't trust the initiator's analysis of the need for change.
- Belief that change is unnecessary. Some will not see the need for change and others will see the need, but will only wish to do it slowly over time.
- Belief that change is not feasible. Many believe that change will not work, partly because other change initiatives did not work.
- Economic threats. If job security is perceived as being threatened, people will resist change.
- The relatively high cost. Many will see the costs as outweighing the benefits or will debate the cost/benefit value.
- Fear of failure. When people have to learn new ways or new knowledge, anxiety can be high. People need to move out of their comfort zone. This brings the risk of failure.
- Loss of status and power. Institutional change may result in changes in positions in the hierarchy. This will cause some people to change or lose their positions.
- Threats to values and ideals. Changes not fitting an individual's values and beliefs can be perceived as a threat to one's integrity and are often strongly resisted.

- Resentment of interference. If people perceive that the change is an attempt to be controlled by others, they may resist. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to resist based on this reason.

Managing change is part of what must happen in the change process. Fullan (1991) identifies several stages in the management of this process:

1. Initiation stage. Positive influences during this stage can be: the existence of quality innovations that people can access, advocacy from central administration, parents and community, teacher advocacy, the impact of external change agents, policies and funding to support the change, willingness of people to see the bigger picture.
2. Implementation stage. Key factors affecting implementation are: the need, quality, clarity, complexity and practicality of the change, the context of the change—where it is coming from, central and local authorities and their influence.
3. Continuation stage. For change to continue and become part of the institution, it must become embedded in the structure of the institution. To do this, it must have a critical mass of support behind it. Resources are provided to continue the innovation and provide aftercare to ensure that new people are initiated in the change.

Another model for managing change was created by Everard and Morris (1985) and involves six stages and a systematic approach:

1. Preliminary diagnosis, investigative or reconnaissance stage. During this stage a careful analysis is done of the need for change, the implications of the proposed

changes, the complexity and magnitude of the change, the support and feasibility, and the context in which the change is to take place.

2. Determining the future stage. Here a wide-ranging view focusing on the organization's future takes place.
3. Characterizing the present stage. Here the present organization is analyzed and described in terms of the future—where we are and where we want to be.
4. Organizing the transition from the present to the future stage. This requires people who are not status quo, risk takers willing to think outside the box. Change groups are often used in this stage.
5. Drawing up plans stage. All activities and tasks specific to the overall purpose of the change must be identified. Target dates are set. Different activities are linked so that the whole picture is complete. Cost analysis is completed to ensure resources will be available. A monitoring and evaluation component is included as one of the tasks.
6. Evaluating the change stage. This is necessary to ensure that progress is being made and that the change is becoming institutionalized.

James and Connelly (2000) agree that these models can be useful but argue that the Fullan (1991) model and the Everard and Morris (1985) model view change as linear and rational and that anyone involved in implementing change recognizes that it is messy, complex and does not follow a nice, neat pattern.

Lewin (1951) describes three stages in his model of managing change:

1. Unfreezing the present usually involves some kind of catalyst such as data indicating the inadequacy of the present situation, evaluation from external consultant, or a crisis that indicates the present situation will no longer work.

2. Moving to a new situation is the process of moving to the new desired outcome.
3. Refreezing where the changes become part of the institutional practice.

Lewin's model can be helpful, but has received criticism (Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992) because it appears to be time-limited and only includes one-dimensional changes and because the re-freezing state returns things to a static and fixed state.

Yukl (1994) analyzed the area of managing change and summarizes the guidelines for managing change into three categories:

1. Developing a vision for change. This vision should be simple, idealistic and should paint a picture of the future. It should not be set out in steps but should have a focus that can guide strategy at the same time as provide flexibility for innovation and creativity; it should be attainable; it should emphasize the ideological benefits; it should be grounded in current reality and should address the values important to the institution, the environment and the people who work in the institution. The development of a vision should include the stakeholders, should have goals that have wide appeal, should include what's relevant from previous beliefs, should link to the core competencies of the institution and should be continually assessed and refined.
2. Political/organizational actions during implementation of the new vision. Implementing the new vision requires that one identify those who can facilitate change and those opposed to change. Time to work with both groups is critical in the implementation stage. Once people who support the change have been identified, they should become the coalition for the implementation of the change. Identify key positions and staff them with effective "change agents". Establish

task forces to assist in the implementation and facilitation of change. Ensure significant, symbolic changes are carried out to demonstrate the efficacy of the change. If possible, start small and build. Begin with what is relevant in the organizational structure. Continue to monitor the progress of the change process so that obstacles can be addressed, coordination of different aspects can happen and effects of the change can be evaluated.

3. People-oriented actions during the change process. Leaders of the change process should develop a sense of urgency about the need for change. Spend time preparing people for the change by describing the benefits and outlining the need for the change. Provide time and assistance for those who have difficulty coping emotionally with the change. Make sure people are provided current information on the status and progress of the change. Communicate commitment to the change process in all that is done. Ask people for help and empower them to implement the change. Having people understand the purpose of the change and allowing them to help is critical to a successful change process.

In their analysis of organizational change, Meyerson and Martin (1987) describe three types of change. The first, revolutionary change, is often leader-centered and encompasses the whole organization. This is a high-risk tactic, often driven by a single "heroic" leader and runs the risk of going out of control. The second, incremental change, is often localized in an organization and can have many adaptations or variations with the different subgroups of the organization. Changes in this case are more isolated and often not connected. The third type of change, continual change, involves change throughout the organization by individuals who choose to be innovative and creative. These changes are usually related to particular issues with individuals altering their practice as they go. This type of change is rather uncontrollable.

However one goes about implementing change, an important first step is to examine the nature of the culture of the organization. This is the next topic to be addressed in the literature review.

Culture

Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) summarized eight schools of thought conceptualizing "culture" as it relates to organizations. Four are classified as ideational systems or systems of ideas where culture is related to the social system in which it exists but, at the same time, remaining distant from that system. In the following three of these four systems, culture is situated in the mind of the individual:

- The cognitive school views culture as a "system of knowledge, of learned standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting" (p. 198).
- The structuralist school views culture as representing a manifestation of processes within the mind at a subconscious level that creates symbolic systems along with others.
- The mutual equivalence school views culture as "a set of standardized cognitive processes which create the general framework for the mutual prediction of behavior among individuals interacting within a social setting" (p. 198).

In the fourth ideational school, culture is a result of the product of multiple minds instead of existing in the mind of the individual.

- The symbolic school views culture as arising from the interpretation of symbols, creating products of the mind, with the resulting shared meaning regulating social behavior.

Allaire and Firsirotu classify the remaining four schools as sociocultural schools, where culture represents elements within the social system rather than a distinct realm. Two of these schools are termed synchronic:

- The functionalist school views culture as representing a means to cope with problems as an individual attempts to get their needs met. Culture is therefore seen as an "instrumental apparatus."
- The structuralist-functionalist school examines culture as "an adaptive mechanism by which a certain number of human beings are enabled to live a social life as an ordered community in a given environment" (p. 197).

The remaining two schools in Allaire and Firsirotu's summary are viewed as "diachronic" in nature because they focus on the creation of culture over time. These are:

- The ecological-adaptationist school which views culture as an evolution of behavior systems that members of an ecological community have developed to cope with their environment. These systems are then transmitted to other members of the organizational community.
- The historical-diffusionist school sees culture as consisting of "temporal, interactive, superorganic and autonomous configurations or forms produced by historical circumstances and processes" (p. 197).

In an alternative approach, Smircich (1983) examined conceptualizations of culture from the perspective of researchers. He identified five different approaches for researching culture in organizations. In the first two themes culture is seen as a variable; in the last three it is seen more as a "root metaphor" for conceptualizing the essence of the organization. In other words, we leave "behind the notion that a culture is something an organization *has*, in favor of the view that a culture is something an organization *is*" (p. 347). The five themes are:

1. Culture as an independent variable. In this approach, culture appears in an organization as a backdrop characterizing and explaining the organization once it's established. The members of the organization are responsible for the creation of culture and use the explanation of the culture to assist in its continuance.
2. Culture as an internal variable. Here culture is seen as being produced by the organization itself. This gives management the wherewithal for structure, technology and strategy to ensure beneficial outcomes for the organization. In this approach culture is viewed as a controllable variable managed by administration according to some template.
3. Cognitive perspective. In this approach the organization is seen as a system of shared knowledge and beliefs or commonly held cognitions amongst its members.
4. Symbolic perspective. This approach sees the organization as "a pattern of symbolic discourse" (p. 350) that requires observation and interpretation into meaningful terms in order to be understood.
5. Structural and psychodynamic perspective. In this approach culture is seen as "the expression of unconscious psychological processes" (p. 351) with these processes being expressed in various practices and structures in the organization.

What is important in examining these schools of thought related to culture is the determination of where we view culture residing (Isaac and Pitt, cited in

Golembiewski, 2001). If one believes that organizational culture exists in the mind of the individual, one must realize that access for changing the culture resides with the individual not with those in management or administrative positions. If one believes that culture resides in the confines of the organization, then the inducement for change rests more directly under the influence and control of management or administration. This will have an impact on how one approaches making changes in existing cultures and forming new cultures.

Culture Formation and Change

"The culture literature is grounded in the symbolic interaction and social construction perspectives developed by Mead (1934) and Berger and Luckmann (1966)" (Denison, 1996, p. 634). Many theories on culture and culture formation have a constructivist slant. For example, Schein (1983) and Gagliardi (1986) postulate that culture formation happens when there is a general acceptance of solutions that cope successfully with issues facing the organization. What can impact this are the problem-solving approaches that individuals take based on their educational background, past experiences, personal assumptions, and personality. As Isaac and Pitt (2001) propose, a beneficially proven solution will be consciously accepted by members of the group as they:

> adopt associated values that indicate "this is the way we do things in this situation." Perceived success determines acceptance and incorporation of these cultural elements. As time passes, group members tend to take these values for granted, and they gradually drop out of conscious awareness. These components have now become assumptions, firmly embedded in the subconscious mind. (cited in Golembiewski, 2001, p. 121)

One of the most critical factors in the formation of culture or the "workscape" images that employees share in their organization is leadership (Akin and Hopelain, 1987; Sherwood, 1988). During culture formation and change, leaders employ both implicit and explicit approaches to creating culture. Three significant mechanisms to shape and change behavior according to Schein (1983) are:

- What leaders pay attention to
- How leaders react to critical events
- Role modeling of leaders

Many other factors leaders might employ in culture formation have been listed in the research (Schein, 1983; Pascale, 1984; Akin and Hopelain, 1987; Beyer and Trice, 1987; Pennings and Gresov, 1986). Following are but a few:

- Criteria used for selection and promotion of employees
- Process for socialization of new members
- Reward and punishment systems and how they fit organizational priorities
- Teamwork and degree of trust and support—macro vs micro management
- Organizational rites related to status, role changes, recognition, power, etc.
- Structure, systems, procedure and technology
- Language, gesture, stories, heroes, folk tales, myths, symbols
- Physical environment

Nelson and Quick (2000) argue that culture in an organization serves four basic functions:

- It provides a sense of identity which should increase commitment to the organization as individuals internalize the values of the organization.

- It is a means for organization members to "make sense" of the organization. Culture provides a way for members to interpret the meaning of events, policies, structures, etc. in the organization.
- It reinforces the values of the organization.
- It serves as a control mechanism for shaping behavior. Peer pressure within the organization is part of this process.

Three theories that attempt to explain the relationship between the culture of an organization and its performance are: the "strong culture" perspective, the "fit" perspective and the "adaptation" perspective (Nelson and Quick, 2000). The strong culture perspective supports the notion that an organization with a strong culture i.e. "an organizational culture with a consensus on the values that drive the company and with an intensity that is recognizable even to outsiders…[one] that is deeply held and widely shared…[and] is highly resistant to change" (Nelson and Quick, 2000, p. 538) will outperform other organizations. This tendency for high performance is due to a culture that:

-is characterized by goal alignment—members share common goals
-creates a high level of motivation because of the shared values
-provides control without the oppressive effects of a bureaucracy

However, Kotter and Heskett (1992) studies 207 firms from a variety of industries. They concluded that "strong cultures were associated with positive long-term economic performance, but only modestly" (Nelson and Quick, 2000, p. 539).

The fit perspective is one in which the culture is considered good "only if it fits the industry's or firm's strategy" (Nelson and Quick, 2000, p. 540). The factors in industry that would affect culture are: the competitive environment, customer requirements and societal expectations. According to Nelson and Quick, "the fit perspective is useful in explaining short-term performance but not long-term performance" (p. 540).

The adaptation perspective argues that "only cultures that help organizations adapt to environmental change are associated with excellent performance" (Nelson and Quick, 2000, p. 540). An adaptive culture focuses on changing needs in the environment, encourages risk taking and utilizes leadership that creates change. Kotter and Heskitt (1992) concluded that the most adaptive cultures produce the best long-term performance because they adjust to the needs of their environment.

Regardless of the perspective used to analyze culture, it is commonly believed that leadership is key to the formation of any culture. Further discussion regarding leadership and culture will take place in the "Leadership" section of the literature review.

School Culture

Most people can recognize a school whether it is here or in another country. There is something universal about schools and classrooms despite geography, place in time or socioeconomic conditions because:

> the classroom embodies a powerful script. The stage, the props, actors, and costumes can vary slightly from level to level, from time to time, or from place to place. But the key roles and the central drama are almost the same—even in other cultures. (Deal, 1987 cited in Sashkin and Walberg, 1993, p. 3)

Despite the enormous amount of research about the culture of school, "no one seems able to explain why the patterns exist or what we can do to make them different" (Deal, 1987 cited in Sashkin and Walberg, p. 4). Partly, "the images of schools and beliefs and assumptions about schooling are encoded early in our experience" (p. 4), and seem to be deeply embedded in human culture however unconscious. Images of schooling, as early as Socrates, evoke pictures of the "master" or "teacher" teaching others. The physical setting might have changed over time, but the roles and scripts have been practiced for a long time. Deal (1987) refers to these as "imprints" and states they serve as the "basis for educational rituals [and] the foundation of educational practice" (p. 4).

> Parents and communities also carry the imprints. The school is a symbol. It needs the right trappings: a flag, a principal, teachers, students, desks and a curriculum. Those outside assume that those inside are following the script....This shared culture of schools and classrooms gives meaning to the process of education. (p. 5)

Much research has been done in an attempt to define and conceptualize the elusive nature of "culture" in schools. In defining culture, Deal and Kennedy (1982) use the definition from *Webster's:* "[Culture is] the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thought, speech, action, artifacts, and depends on man's [sic] capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations" (cited in Sashkin and Walberg, 1993, p. 6). Wilson (1971) defined culture as "socially shared and transmitted knowledge of what is, and what ought to be, symbolized in art and artifact" (p. 90).

Despite the fact that, on the one hand, "schools look, feel and even smell alike" (Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988, p. 7), diversity in school cultures is a well-established fact (Lightfoot, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Metz, 1978,1986).

> Tradition, leadership, community expectations, and critical events all combine to infuse idiosyncratic elements into a schools' culture….schools can differ in the value placed on order, in their emphasis on academic competition, in their views of students as active or passive learners, and in the implication of these differences for both program and everyday instruction. (Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988, p. 7)

School cultures are "complex entities that do not develop overnight….they are shaped by the ways principals, teachers, and key people reinforce, nurture, or transform underlying norms, values, beliefs and assumptions….[these] cultural patterns are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, and shape the ways people think, act and feel" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 4). Studies (Rutter, et al., 1979; Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988; Fullan, 1998) found that school culture was critical to successful teaching and learning. "Improvement efforts were likely in schools where positive professional cultures had norms, values, and beliefs that reinforced a strong educational mission. Culture was a key factor in determining whether improvement was possible" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 5). In a study comparing public and private schools, Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) found that a sense of community was essential to establishing a sense of excellence. McLaughlin (1995) found, in a longitudinal study, that schools demonstrating higher performance had a positive culture. Newmann and Associates (1996) found that changing the structures within a school was not enough for improvement. The culture had to be changed as well so that the focus was primarily on student learning. Everyone had to commit to establishing high expectations. There needed to be support for trying new things, and there had to be professional discourse and research into better practices. There was also an "ethos of caring, sharing, and mutual help among staff, and between staff and students, based on respect, trust, and shared power relations among staff" (p. 289).

School culture affects everything that happens in a school and has a powerful impact on performance. According to Deal and Peterson (1999):

> *Culture fosters school effectiveness and productivity* (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Newmann and Associates, 1996). Teachers can succeed in a culture focused on productivity (rather than on maintenance or ease of work), performance (hard work, dedication, perseverance), and improvement (continuous fine-tuning and refinement of teaching).
>
> *Culture improves collegial and collaborative activities that foster better communication and problem-solving practices* (Little, 1982; Peterson and Brietzke, 1994). In school culture valuing collegiality and collaboration, there is a better climate for the social and professional exchange of ideas, the enhancement and spread of effective practices, and widespread professional problem-solving.
>
> *Culture fosters successful change and improvement efforts* (Little, 1982; Louis and Miles, 1990; Deal and Peterson, 1990)....A school's culture encourages learning and progress by fostering a climate of purposeful change, support for risk taking and experimentation, and a community spirit valuing purposeful progress.
>
> *Culture builds commitment and identification of staff, students and administrators* (Schein, 1985). People are motivated and feel committed to an organization that has meaning, values, and an ennobling purpose.
>
> *Culture amplifies energy, motivation, and vitality of a school staff, students, and community*....the social climate and culture of a school influence the emotional and psychological orientation of the staff.
>
> *Culture increases the focus of daily behavior and attention on what is important and valued.* (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985)....With strong and meaningful values, daily work is focused on the important issues of quality instruction, continuous refinement of teaching, and the accelerated learning of all students. (pp. 7-9)

Positive school cultures do not happen by accident. Clark (1972) argued that new cultures will emerge under one of three conditions: (1) when an organization is new, (2) when an organization is open to change, or (3) when a crisis forces the organization to examine its practices, norms and values. So when the opportunity presents itself and we look to building positive school culture, what should we be trying to build? The research in this area is prolific; however, Deal and Peterson (1999) have summarized the general elements of positive school cultures and suggest that schools with a positive culture have:

- A mission focused on student and teacher learning
- A rich sense of history and purpose
- Core values of collegiality, performance, and improvement that engender quality, achievement, and learning for everyone
- Positive beliefs and assumptions about the potential of students and staff to learn and grow
- A strong professional community that uses knowledge, experience, and research to improve practice
- An informal network that fosters positive communication flow
- Shared leadership that balances continuity and improvement
- Rituals and ceremonies that reinforce core cultural values
- Stories that celebrate successes and recognize heroines and heroes
- A physical environment that symbolizes joy and pride
- A widely shared sense of respect and caring for everyone (p. 116)

To provide our children with the best education possible, we must attend to making our schools places where these elements exist. This requires good leadership, hard work, commitment, enthusiasm, energy and persistence.

Organizational Leadership

In reviewing the literature on organizational leadership:

> Many argue (e.g., Feyerabend, 1975; Mason and Mitroff, 1981) that we are in the midst of a paradigmatic struggle that is changing both the way that organizations are conceptualized and the manner in which they are structured...[and that] there is a marked shift away from contingency approaches that view organizations as distinct units constrained and determined by the environment (Reed and Hughes, 1992) and toward theories that define organizations as unique, interrelated cultures with complex symbolic dimensions as construed by their members (e.g., Turner, 1990). This change in thought has seen the corresponding fading of rationality and bureaucracy as predominant structures as well as the

> emergence of organizational forms that are based on diversity and that demand flexibility in their configuration. (Kuhnert, 2001, p. 240)

Kuhnert (2001) goes on to argue that "at the level of theory, research and method, the psychology of leadership suffers from a certain stuckness" (p, 239) and that what is "characteristic of leadership literature is the separation between those who conduct leadership development (e.g. consultants) and those who research it (e.g., academics)" (p. 239). He proposes that we should "explore new ways of looking at organizations as well as the implications of a postmodernistic view of organizations for leadership theory" (p. 240).

Kuhnert (2000) uses the term "modernist" in reference to "a form of knowledge that is based on principles of rationalism, differentiation, and the "one-best" method" (p. 241). His use of "postmodernism" is constructive in that he

> seek[s] to overcome the limitations of modernist organizations by constructing a postmodernist organization reversing (revising) modernist principles of organizations. Being postmodernist thus refers to a moving away from those principles of the modernist, and toward forms of knowledge based on nonrational, interrelatedness, and dedifferentiation. (p. 241)

He argues that traditional organizational practice can no longer explain or handle events such as "corporate restructuring, intense global competition, and a worldwide recession" (p. 241). As Clegg (1990) and others (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Torbert, 1976) have argued, we must challenge "the entrenched rationalistic, deterministic, and bureaucratic view of organizations, and replace it with the concept of a values-driven organization that is characterized by flexibility and fluidity and is based on principles of interaction and synthesis" (Kuhnert, 2001, p. 241).

Part of the problem in this transition from the modernist to the postmodernist in organizational behavior is that the modernist paradigm is so strongly embedded that attempts to change have backfired and have simply been absorbed into the modernist paradigm. Kuhnert examines the attempt that was made by the creators of "total quality management" or TQM (Garvin, 1988). This management philosophy known for its "1) commitment to "continuous" improvement, 2) the analytical evaluation of work, 3) development of a "quality" culture, and 4) the empowerment of employees" (Kuhnert, 2001, p. 244), became easily absorbed into the modernist paradigm. "For many companies, TQM became just another management fad, where quality came to mean whatever managements said it was doing to improve the organization" (p. 245). In fact, organizations became so good at absorbing and adapting TQM, more of what TQM was trying to decrease—i.e. bureaucracy, actually increased (Kuhnert, 2001).

One of the best models of the trend toward postmodernism in organizations is the Internet (Kuhnert, 2001).

> Lessig (1999) identified two underlying values of the Internet and the way the Internet works: 1) the open source tradition of the Internet, in which "a common problem is placed in a common space and people around the world work on it in parallel," and 2) "universal standing where one proves one's authority through what one does." (p. 2)

He argues that the values dominating the Internet will at some point infiltrate and dominate the non-Internet business world. "The remaining important question is how to tap these values in a "brick and mortar" business. The Internet and its values might be as critical to business as electricity is to power" (p. 245).

Interestingly, the Internet and its use has received tremendous debate in educational circles partly because of the open-environment and the seemingly "lack of control" over information. Our modernist paradigm of education has always been one where the teacher is the expert holder of the knowledge and the student is the receptacle waiting for that knowledge as a vase awaits being filled with water. Fortunately, some people are challenging this paradigm. However, it is still prevalent in our educational institutions and within the structures and technology (or lack of) that currently exist within our government and our school districts. This complex issue requires continuous discourse.

Part of the challenge will involve studying leadership from the perspective of "process" rather than "effects".

> Modernist studies of leadership show tendencies consistent with modernist organizations, including restricting the study of leadership only to those persons who hold positions of authority within the bureaucracy, narrowing the examination of leadership to the restricted viewpoint of the leader or the leader-follower dyad, and developing theories and models of leadership that are static and assume consistency in both leaders and their followers…[with the result that] we have learned some about how to manipulate people to get something accomplished, but not much about the nature of leadership….postmodern organizations require postmodern theories of leadership. (p. 245)

One result of the economic recession of the past decade has been that organizations have had to restructure, downsize and reengineer. Our educational institutions have had to do likewise. "One of the many consequences of such changes was the pressure on formal leaders to push decision making down to lower levels of the organization. Managers, like everyone else, were forced to do more work with fewer resources and it was inevitable that the work of leaders would change" (Kuhnert, 2001, p. 246).

In today's study of organizational leadership, Kuhnert (2001) suggests a postmodern approach to studying leadership would include the following propositions:

Proposition One: Rational Leadership Models Must Be Complemented with "Nonrational" Models

Proposition Two: Leadership Is Fundamentally About Human Value

Proposition Three: Searching for a Single Cause or for a Single Model of Leadership Does More Harm Than Good

Proposition Four: Research Methods Must Rely on Synthesis as Opposed to Analysis

Proposition Five: The Objects of Study Must Include the Observable as Well as the Representational or Symbolic

In the postmodernist organization leaders will need to:

> - Base their decisions on logic and fact, but more importantly, on their own and their followers' beliefs, convictions and preferences.
> - Better understand the complex internal relationships among worker's jobs, organizational units, and related organizations as well as the external relationships between the organization and its environment.
> - Be able to manage flexibility and foster diversity and creativity among their employees. (p. 251)

In postmodernist organizations it will become increasingly more difficult to nail down responsibility and communication and personal ethics will become increasingly more important.

The age-old approach to leadership such as Aristotle's development of Alexander the Great and Plato's men of "gold" (to distinguish them from men of "bronze"—artisans and workers) was to develop leaders out of people who by birth were assumed to be leaders. Over time this has been replaced by the notion that "learned abilities and circumstances make the main difference in leadership" (Drath, 1998, p. 403). The evolution of leadership has moved through several phases:

- from the ancient idea of the leader as the absolute ruler;
- to the notion of leaders as influencers whose job was to get people to do what they (the leaders) thought needed doing;
- to the notion that leaders and followers share a commitment to a larger purpose resulting in a narrowing of the gap between leader and follower and redistributing power.

Despite these changes in leadership over time, the one thing that doesn't seem to have changed is the need for leadership.

> People have always appeared to need some force within their various groups, communities, tribes and organizations to help them create direction, avoid disaster, and respond to changes in their surroundings. The goals of creating direction and responding to external changes remain as much alive today as ever before. (Darth, 1998, p. 406)

Darth's (1998, p. 408) evolving model of leadership (Table 2) supports Kuhnert's postmodernist model of leadership.

Table 2.1

	Ancient	Traditional	Modern	Future
Idea of Leadership	Domination	Influence	Common Goals	Recipricol relations
Action of Leadership	Commanding followers	Motivating followers	Creating inner commitment	Mutual meaning making
Focus of leadership development	Power of the leader	Interpersonal skills of the leader	Self-knowledge of the leader	Interactions of the group

As Darth further expands "the idea of leadership that seems to be emerging calls for rethinking the source of leadership. It will no longer be thought of as something initiated by the leader (or by the followers) but understood to begin in *the reciprocal connections of people working together*" (p. 414). This goes beyond the notion that leadership is a personal trait and that anyone can be a leader. It must go to what Darth refers to as "shared meaning making" which "refers to the reciprocal social processes by which a group of people agree on how to understand some phenomenon and what value to place on it" (p. 415). He suggests that "leadership begins and ends in the interrelations of people working together" (p. 414). Darth's view of leadership goes beyond who the leader is and how they can bring influence to bear, to:

> the processes by which people come to understand and attach meaning to shared work…leadership is understood as being much more important than before because not only does it involve creating shared goals and motivating people to work toward them but it also constitutes the very ground that makes goals (or even lack of goals) meaningful. (p.432)

Given this need for new types of leadership and given that schools are often the training grounds for future leaders, what are the implications for leadership in schools?

Educational Leadership

It is my perception, after twenty-nine years as an educator, that many people in educational circles remain entrenched in the modernist paradigm. I see people looking for the ""one-best" solution, emphasizing form over substance, structure over people and power over working relationships" (Kuhnert, 2001, p.

241). Perhaps it is because modernism is such a large part of the cultural history of the babyboomer generation. We grew up and went to school during the modernist era when things were less complex. We often look back fondly (and perhaps inaccurately) on the days when the "3 R's" were taught and emphasized and when someone in the hierarchy—the "teacher", the "principal", the "boss", knew the answer. We grew up in a culture of "do what you are told" and you will be rewarded. These encultured beliefs and values are hard to let go of because, for many of us, they worked.

Today's world is tremendously more complex and calls for other ways of doing things. It is difficult, however, to change how we do things when babyboomers form somewhat of a majority of the population in our educational structures. Many babyboomers (and I include myself in this even though I know better) believe there is an answer and that someone has that answer. Perhaps that is why shifting paradigms in education and schooling has been so difficult and why schools today still look much like schools of yesterday.

The modernist top-down hierarchy still exists in our educational structures despite the complexity of today's world and the many efforts to decentralize and include stakeholders in decision-making. In education it is a time of mixed messages, scarcity of resources, decreasing confidence, increasing pressure to perform (even though we're not sure what that means), and decreasing interest in taking on teaching or leadership roles. Amidst this confusion, what is emerging about leadership whether it be in our schools or in institutions and organizations is that it must be more sophisticated in order to deal with the complexities of change that are all around us (Fullan, 2001).

The literature on school culture and educational leadership has been significantly impacted by work in the area of organizational leadership. It has been argued (Fullan, 2001) that there is increasingly more common ground between the education world and the world of business despite the efforts in educational circles to deny or ignore any influence from the corporate sector. As Fullan (2001) indicates "the requirements of knowledge societies bring education and business leadership closer than they have ever been before. Corporations need souls and schools need minds (and vice versa) if the knowledge society is to survive—sustainability demands it" (p. 136).

As noted earlier, leadership is critical to the success or failure of building positive school cultures. However, what we do not need, says Fullan is "superleaders."

> Charismatic leaders inadvertently often do more harm than good because, at best, they provide episodic improvement followed by frustrated or despondent dependency. Superhuman leaders also do us another disservice: they are role models who can never be emulated by large numbers. (p. 3)

"Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 21).

Fullan (2001) describes five components of leadership that "represent independent but mutual reinforcing forces for positive change" (p. 3) in organizations as well as in schools—moral purpose, understanding of the change process, strong relationships, knowledge building and coherence making among multiple priorities. Following is a brief description of each of these five components:

1. Moral purpose

Moral purpose is about making a difference in the lives of people. In education, it means to make a difference in the lives of students. Improving how we live together is a moral purpose of the "highest order." In his description of moral leadership, Sergiovanni (1999) refers to the "lifeworld of leadership" and authentic leaders as having "integrity, reliability, moral excellence, a sense of purpose, firmness of conviction, steadiness, and unique qualities of style and substance" (p. 17). He goes on to say that "authentic leaders anchor their practice in ideas, values, and commitments, exhibit distinctive qualities of style and substance, and can be trusted to be morally diligent in advancing the enterprises they lead" (p. 17).

Fullan (2001) indicates that if leadership is to be effective it must "(1) have an explicit "making-a-difference" sense of purpose, (2) use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle tough problems, (3) be held accountable by measured and debatable indicators of success, and (4) be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it…mobilizes everyone's sense of moral purpose" (p. 21). Moral purpose can, on the other hand, be problematic in that it must deal with diverse views and interests of many different groups. It, however, is a goal worthy of pursuing because "to achieve moral purpose is to forge interaction—and even mutual purpose—across groups" (p. 25). Any sustained performance of the organization and its moral purpose are mutually dependent (Fullan, 2001).

2. Understanding of the change process

Because change is messy, constant and often happening rapidly, it is absolutely critical that leaders understand it and its process. "Understanding the change process is less about innovation and more about innovativeness. It is less about strategy and more about strategizing" (Fullan, 2001, p. 31). What many have realized is that change is not manageable and that "the best way to 'manage' change is to allow for it to happen" (Mintzberg et al., 1998, p. 324). In understanding the change process:

- The goal is not to innovate the most
- It is not enough to have the best ideas
- Appreciate the implementation dip
- Redefine resistance
- Reculturing is the name of the game
- Never a checklist, always complexity (Fullan, 2001, p. 34)

Goleman (2000) studied organizational leadership in times of change and describes six leadership styles:

- Coercive—requires compliance—do as I say
- Authoritative—requires followship—I'll show you the way
- Affiliative—requires harmony and building relationships—people come first
- Democratic—requires consensus through participation
- Pacesetting—requires meeting standards of high performance
- Coaching—requires the development of people for the future

Goleman found that the coercive and pacesetting styles of leadership negatively affect culture and, in turn, the performance of the organization. The coercive style of leadership causes resistance and resentment and the pacesetting style overwhelms and burns people out.

The other four styles had a significant positive impact on performance and culture. It was interesting that the authoritative style had a positive impact on performance. Authoritative leaders (also called visionary leaders) have a vision and ask people to follow them in pursuing that vision. "For some situations, when there is an urgent problem and people are at sea, visionary leaders can be crucial. And at all times, it helps when leaders have good ideas" (Fullan, 2001, p. 39), but it is easy to slip into social engineering using this style when the vision does not become internalized. It is essential that leaders recognize these leadership styles along with the inherent weaknesses and strengths and guide their behavior accordingly. As Goleman concludes "leaders who have mastered four or more—especially the authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching styles—have the best climate and business performance" (p. 87).

3. Strong relationships

Many people in successful organizations including successful schools will attribute the success of the organization to the people in the organization. But, as Fullan (2001) argues, that is only partially true—it is the relationships amongst the people that makes the difference. In their book *The Soul at Work*, Lewin and Regine (2000) discuss "complexity science" and how it impacted their work.

> This new science…leads to a new theory of business that places people and relationships—how people interact with each other, the kinds of relationships they form—into dramatic relief….in a nonlinear, dynamic world, everything exists only in relationship to everything else, and the interactions among agents in the system lead to complex, unpredictable outcomes…interactions or relationships among its agents are the organizing principle. (pp. 18, 19)

They believe that "most people want to be part of their organization; they want to know the organization's purpose; they want to make a difference. When the individual soul is connected to the organization, people become connected to something deeper—the desire to contribute to a larger purpose, to feel they are part of a greater whole, a web of connection" (p. 27). Leaders must be genuine and develop relationships based on authenticity and caring—you can't fake it.

Kouzes and Posner (1998) argue that "leaders create relationships" (p, xv) and that the following are essential in the development of relationships:

- Setting clear standards
- Expecting the best
- Paying attention
- Personalizing recognition
- Telling the story
- Celebrating together
- Setting the example

Goffee and Jones (2000) postulate that we should be led by people who inspire us and that those who inspire us should: selectively show us their weaknesses thereby revealing their humanity and vulnerability, rely on their intuition, manage employees with a kind of "tough love", and allow for differences.

When Anthony Alvarado became superintendent of District 2 in New York in 1987, the district ranked tenth in reading and fourth in mathematics. Eight years later it ranked second in both reading and mathematics out of thirty-two subdistricts. He operated with the following seven principles:

- Instruction and only instruction was what it was all about
- Instructional improvement requires a long, multistage process involving awareness, planning, implementation, and reflection
- Shared expertise would be the leading force in bringing about change

- The only focus was system wide improvement
- Talented people working together create good ideas and lots of energy
- Establish clear expectations and decentralize so people can do the work
- Highlight collegiality, caring and respect

Alvarado created a culture for building what Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) refer to as "school capacity" which includes teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes; the professional community; program continuity and coherence; technical resources and principal leadership. Quality leadership is critical to the building of school capacity because, as Elmore (2000) indicates, "the job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result" (p. 15).

I liken the job of the principal to that of a conductor in an orchestra. To create beautiful music, you have to make sure there are enough of the right players and instruments for the music you are playing; that these players know what they are doing and are willing participants who play with passion; that everyone knows the "score" and their part in it; and that there is a place for creativity and flair. Sometimes the music is complex and calls for serious study and work, at other times it is less structured and calls for improvisation. But, when it is done well, it brings pleasure to everyone.

4. Knowledge building

Brown and Dugaid (2000) separate information from knowledge by arguing that knowledge involves people and that information only becomes knowledge in a social context. "It is people, in their communities, organizations and institutions, who ultimately decide what it all means and why it matters" (p. 18). Good leaders help build a climate for sharing knowledge. Dixon (2000) disagrees with the contention that "the exchange of knowledge happens only in organizations that have a noncompetitive or a collaborative culture….I have found that it's the other way around. If people begin sharing ideas about issues they see as really important, the sharing itself creates a learning culture" (p. 5).

Fullan (2001) argues that the organization must "frame the giving and receiving of knowledge as a responsibility and must reinforce such sharing through incentives and opportunities to engage in it" (p. 86). Von Krogh et al. (2000) agree: "from our standpoint, a 'caring expert' is an organizational member who reaches her [sic] level of personal mastery in tacit and explicit knowledge *and* understands that she [sic] is responsible for sharing the process (p. 52).

"Schools are in the business of teaching and learning, yet they are terrible at learning from each other" (Fullan, 2001, p. 92). Peer networks, intervisitations, support group meetings, peer coaching, district institutes, and study groups are ways to bring teachers and principals in contact with one another for the purpose of sharing knowledge. Time for these things to occur should be built into the schedules of educators as ways of building knowledge.

5. Coherence making

Times of change often seem chaotic bringing us a sense of messiness and disorder. This can be a good thing and can inspire creativity and "out of the box" thinking. However, for administrators it means "living on the edge [where you are] simultaneously letting go and reining in" (Fullan, 2001, p. 107). Pascale, Millemann and Gioja (2000) suggest that the mind set for leading in a culture of change is to realize that "the world is not chaotic, it is complex" (p. 6) and that working through the complexities of innovations in a collegial environment will, hopefully, bring about some cohesion.

The main problem in schools is not that there are no innovations, but that there are too many "disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects" (Fullan, 2001, p. 109) and that this situation is worse for schools than businesses because they also have "the additional burden of having a torrent of unwanted, uncoordinated policies and innovations raining down on them from hierarchical bureaucracies" (p. 109). "In a study of 57 different districts from 1992-1995, Hess (1999) reports that the typical urban district pursued more than eleven 'significant initiatives' in basic areas such as rescheduling, curriculum, assessment, professional development and school management" (Hatch, 2000, pp.1-2). This kind of disturbance is counterproductive and serves only to exhaust people. Hatch suggests disturbance as a strategy to bring about change, but the key is to disturb people in a way that helps achieve the desired outcome. "Productive disturbance is likely to happen when it is guided by moral purpose" (Fullan, 2001, p. 110). Fullan also says that

> the route to making good things happen and preventing more bad things from occurring is a process that generates widespread internal commitment from members of the organization. You can't get there from here without amplifying and working through the discomfort of disturbances….[and that] effective leadership means guiding people through the differences and, indeed, enabling differences to surface" (pp. 113-114).

Creating coherence from what appears to be chaos is part of the job of the leader. In doing this, leaders should "design more than engineer, discover more than dictate, and decipher more than presuppose" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 175). Claxton (1997) adds to this by saying that, in a culture of change, leaders should be more like the tortoise and less like the hare. "Hare brained" is about relentlessly chasing innovation; "tortoise mind" is about working through disturbances to create new patterns. Fullan (2001) outlines the three lessons for leading in times of change:

> the vital and paradoxical need for slow knowing, the importance of learning in context, and the need for leaders at all levels of the organization, in order to achieve widespread internal commitment....beware of leaders who are always sure of themselves. Effective leaders listen attentively....ineffective leaders make up their minds prematurely. (p. 124)

Summary

The literature review covered the topics of school effectiveness and improvement, change, culture, culture formation and change, school culture and organizational and educational leadership. Understanding the work of the principal touches all these topics and more. The work of principals is complex and encompasses everything that happens within their schools. Their work is certainly impacted by what happens outside their schools as well, which just adds to the complexity. It is work that is critical to the success of students and it is work that not just anyone can do. In fact, the pressures of the job have become so complex that fewer people are choosing it as a career.

Many principals have entered schools with "toxic" cultures and have successfully changed them into schools with dynamic and positive cultures. This research examined how principals view culture, what they did to build schools with positive cultures and their reflections of the journey.

Chapter 3

Research Method and Design

Paradigm, Ontology and Epistemology

As I prepared for my research, I examined several paradigms, the positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical theory and interpretive paradigms and believe that the constructivist paradigm most closely fits my personal ontology. "Constructivism, as presented by Guba and Lincoln, adopts a relativist (relativism) ontology, a transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic/dialectical methodology. The inquiry aims of this paradigm are oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 100). The constructivist paradigm acknowledges, "what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind....constructivists emphasize the instrumental and practical function of theory construction and knowing" (Schwandt cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 125).

As Schwandt (1994) postulates:

> We are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge....constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in light of new experience. (Schwandt cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.126).

Goodman (1978), who has been credited with providing definition to the concept of constructivism, says that we are not just trying to understand a ready-made world, but that "worldmaking as we know it starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking" (Goodman cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.

126). “These “remakings” are not simply different interpretations of the same world, but literally different world versions….our frames of interpretation (versions) belong both to what is interpreted (worlds) and to a system of interpretation” (Schwandt cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 126). Goodman (1984) suggests that instead of using the word ‘truth’ we should instead use the word ‘rightness’ in judging world versions for their ‘truthfulness’. Rightness is “not a fitting *onto*—a correspondence or matching or mirroring of independent Reality—but a fitting *into* a context or discourse or standing complex of other symbols” (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 126). He further argues that the goal of cognition is to advance understanding:

> from what happens to be currently adopted and proceed to integrate and organize, weed out and supplement, not in order to arrive at truth about something already made but in order to make something right—to construct something that works cognitively, that fits together and handles new cases, that may implement further inquiry and invention. (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 127)

Guba and Lincoln (1989) originally defined a framework called ‘naturalistic inquiry’ which they later changed to ‘constructivism’. Their idealistic philosophy assumes “that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals….[that] truth is a matter of the best-informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus at a given time” (Schwandt cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1984, p. 128). This philosophy has particular appeal to me as it resonates with how I think we live and work together. In our daily living and working discourses, ideas, notions, understandings (constructions) are shared as we go about solving problems, changing plans or achieving goals. Part of that discourse may include rethinking, or reconstructing understandings.

My interest in how principals build positive school cultures will provide me with some opportunities to examine existing constructions in the literature in this area as well as have a dialogue with some colleagues about their constructions on how to build positive school culture. I hope to 'supplement' and/or 'weed out' what we already know about what principals do to build positive school cultures and by so doing perhaps come to a better informed and more sophisticated understanding (construction) of the journey and processes that might, in turn, help others become more informed.

Given the tremendous amount of research that has been done in the area of change, managing change, leadership strategies and characteristics, and building school cultures; and, given all the prescriptive strategies to do the job, why is it that some principals are more successful than others? Do they pay particular attention to 'something' in the doing of their job; and, if so, what is that something? Is it their personality or is it that their personality fits the needs of that particular school at a particular time and their superintendents showed uncanny ability in selecting the right person for the right job? And, just exactly what is it that these people are doing—do they know—is it something tangible or explicit or is it tacit knowledge and will they be able to articulate this knowledge?

Research Design

In this section I will attempt to answer the four basic questions of research design according to Denzin and Lincoln (1984). The four questions are: "(a) How will the design connect to the paradigm being used? (b) Who or what will be studied? (c) What strategies of inquiry will be used? (d) What methods or research tools will be used for collecting and analyzing empirical materials?" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 200).

In constructivism, much less formal, structured or predetermined research strategies are used. Denzin and Lincoln liken the research in these paradigms to a "path of discovery". In my path of discovery I examined existing constructions regarding positive school culture from both the research literature and from the colleagues I interviewed.

Using a semi-structured interview format and utilizing an interview guide with open-ended questions, I dialogued with six principals who were available and willing, who had been identified by their superintendents as having schools with positive school cultures and had schools that represented the divisions of elementary, junior high and high school. My intent was to compare and contrast what these principals said about how they created positive school cultures with what the research literature says about the topic—in other words to examine the existing constructions and the personal knowledge of those in the field to see what new understandings we can construct. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed by either a professional transcriber or myself, and data were inductively analyzed for categories, patterns or thematic constructions. The nature of the topic leant itself to the semi-structured interview format:

> Researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain a detailed picture of a respondent's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of a particular topic....[which] gives the researcher and respondent much more flexibility....[because] the researcher is able to follow up particularly interesting avenues that emerge in the interview and the respondent is able to give a fuller picture. (Smith, 1995 cited in Harré and Langenhove, 1995, p. 9)

Then, using qualitative analysis, "an attempt is made to capture the richness of the themes emerging from the respondent's talk" (p. 9). In this study I am assuming that "what a respondent says in the interview has some ongoing significance for him or her and that there is some, though not a transparent, relationship between what the person says and beliefs or psychological constructs that he or she can be said to hold" (p.10). It is these constructs I was interested in understanding.

Profile of the Participants

To maintain as much anonymity for the six principals who agreed to participate in this study, I have described their administrative profiles and schools (Table 3.1) in a way that will protect their identities to the best of my abilities.

Table 3.1

Principal Pseudonym	Experience in Education	Experience in Administration (Assistant Principal or Principal)	Size of School	Grades
Pamela	22 years	11 years	Over 2000 students	10-12
Marylea	22 years	12 years	Over 1500 students	10-12
Justine	25 years	11 years	Under 300 students	9-12
Matthew	29 years	17 years	Under 300 students	K-9
James	36 years	20 years	Over 1500 students	K-12
Michael	29 years	20 years	Under 400 students	K-6

Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

Data were collected from initial interviews that were about sixty minutes in length. Other communication occurred through e-mail and telephone conversations as the need arose. All interviews were tape recorded to provide an accurate and easy method to review each interview (Glesne, 1999). Any potential problems with the questions or discussions were recorded by pen on paper. Second interviews were conducted when clarification was needed and these were tape-recorded as well. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber or myself and analyzed to ascertain emergent themes and to inform my research. Each transcript contained a caution note explaining that they are a record of oral language and might not be grammatically correct. All participants reviewed all their own transcripts and changes or edits were made as they requested. Once the dissertation is completed, executive summaries will be sent to each participant. Inductive analysis was conducted to determine emergent themes, constructs, or patterns on how principals build positive school cultures.

Methodology

"The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and report or code the answers. Yet, interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings" (Fontana and Frey cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 361). I chose to interview individuals in a face-to-face verbal format to allow for interaction. The semi-structured format was used to allow for flexibility and the pursuit of interesting aspects as they arose in the interview.

Following the constructivist paradigm, "knowledge accumulates only in a relative sense through the formation of ever more informed and sophisticated constructions via the hermeneutical/dialectical process…[and] one important mechanism for transfer of knowledge from one setting to another is the provision of vicarious experience" (Guba and Lincoln cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). Interviewing principals who have been identified by their superintendents as having been successful in building schools with positive cultures allowed for a better understanding of the process, strategies and actions they took in achieving success.

The interviews I conducted were with colleagues I had or have worked with over the course of my career in education. This, I believe, allowed for an intimacy to the dialogue that might not be there had I not known or worked with these participants. As Fontana and Frey noted in terms of the interview format, "the emphasis is shifting to allow the development of a closer relation between interviewer and respondent, attempting to minimize status differences and doing away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing" (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 370). They go on to say:

> Interviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings. Methodologically, this new approach provides a greater spectrum of responses and a greater insight into respondents—or "participants,"….because it allows them to control the sequencing and the language of the interview and also allows them the freedom of open-ended responses. (p. 370)

Conversations with the principals involved "'give and take' as well as 'empathic understanding' [making] the interview more honest, morally sound, equal, [and allowed participants] to express personal feelings, and therefore [presented] a more "realistic" picture than can be uncovered using traditional methods" (Fontana and Frey cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 371). Because I work in the same profession the use of similar language and our shared understandings in terms of the history we have together in the same district allowed, I believe, "a "sharedness of meanings" in which both interviewer and respondent understand the contextual nature of the interview" (Fontana and Frey cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 371).

Limitations

All principals in this study came from the same school jurisdiction that has a well established philosophy. Principals in this jurisdiction are well-informed and generally supportive of the philosophy.

Trustworthiness Criteria

In constructivism "internal and external validity are replaced by the terms *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 100).

Trustworthiness includes the criteria of:

> credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability) and confirmability (paralleling objectivity) (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985); and the authenticity criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions), educative authenticity (leads to improved understandings of constructions of others), catalytic authenticity (stimulates to action), and tactical authenticity (empowers action) (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). (Guba and Lincoln cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 114)

Because constructivists:

> share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it....the act of inquiry begins with issues and/or concerns of participants and unfolds through a "dialectic" of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e., findings or outcomes). (Schwandt cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, pp. 118 & 129).

These joint constructions can be assessed based on their pragmatic value—do they "fit", do they "work" and are they relevant and modifiable (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). It would seem that examining data in this study for consensus in terms of practices and understandings among the participants as well as perceived evidence of success should lead to improved understandings about how principals build positive school cultures. In the constructivist view, the "taste is in the pudding" in that the body of knowledge being created will demonstrate its relevance and usability if others see and accept it and then use it in their own practice. To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity, member checks were accomplished by having participants review their transcripts and my interpretations of the data to ensure accuracy and credibility of the findings. Peer debriefing was achieved through conversations with my supervisory committee.

Ethics and Protection of Participants

Prior to the commencement of research a *Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board Graduate Student Application for Ethics Review* was completed and approved. Following this, a *Cooperative Activities Program (CAPS) Research Project Application* was completed and approved by participating Boards providing permission to approach individual principals to participate in the research. The Superintendent of the participating Board received a letter introducing the research and requesting his input into the selection of the principals. The Superintendent was asked to reflect on a list (provided by me) of elements of positive school culture derived from research literature and to assess information he had access to regarding indicators of positive school culture before discussing possible participants with the researcher. The Superintendent has knowledge of achievement results, enrolment histories, and satisfaction surveys where parents, staff and students were asked for their perceptions on several aspects of their schools including many elements that make up positive school culture.

Because of my experience and personal knowledge of some participants and the work they have done in their schools, I offered some suggestions as well. Through this conversation six principals were identified and were contacted initially by telephone and then by letter requesting their participation. Both the telephone conversation and letter explained the purpose of the research, their involvement in the research, time commitments, and confidentiality guarantees.

All participants were informed of their right to opt out of the research at any time during the study and were guaranteed confidentiality through a written guarantee of confidentiality as well as a confirmed agreement that pseudonyms would be assigned. All participants were able to review transcripts of recorded interviews and could omit any details they so wished.

Issues of confidentiality were handled by vague description or by omitting details and descriptions that might lead to possible identification of individuals or school districts. All audiotapes were secured in a locked vault in my residence and transcribers were required to sign a consent letter agreeing to keep all transcripts confidential. All software was retrieved from the transcribers and all transcript files on the hard drives of the transcribers were purged when transcriptions were complete. In an initial informed consent letter, permission for secondary use of the data was included.

Research Timeline

This study was completed according to the following timeline:

- September, 2002-March, 2003—preparation and refinement of research proposal including literature review
- April, 2003—oral candidacy examination
- May-September, 2003—commencement of data collection, and initial data analysis
- September 2003-February 2004—completion of data collection, analysis and commencement of dissertation
- March, 2004-August, 2004—revisions and completion of final dissertation text
- April 2005—oral examination on the dissertation

Initial Interview Process

A practicing principal, included in the sample set, was selected for an initial interview for the purpose of clarifying the semi-structured interview format and questions from the interview guide. Questions for the interview were used as guides to gain insights into how principals build positive cultures in their schools. This interview was also conducted to identify any potential problems in the interview process and to obtain preliminary data for analysis. The collection of some initial data enabled me to see if enough data could be collected with one interview.

Because of the historical nature of the principals' reflections and the complexity of the topic and the fact that the process of building culture takes place over a long period of time, the initial interview took more than one hour in order to collect extensive data. Other participants were contacted to ensure they were able to make a commitment for a longer period of time (1 ½ -2 hours) and were still interested in participating in the research.

Summary

In the constructivist paradigm, the aim of inquiry is "*understanding and reconstruction* of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (Guba and Lincoln cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). Progress is indicated when more informed and sophisticated constructions are created. These "remade" constructions can be used to inform others and to generate continued inquiry or reconstruction. As Guba and Lincoln state, "change is facilitated as reconstructions are formed and individuals are stimulated to act on them" (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 115).

As a researcher, my goal was to better understand how principals build positive school cultures and part of this goal was achieved with the participation of individuals who have created or experienced schools with positive school cultures. I believe that the culture of a school impacts all that happens in a school. I also believe that the principal is the carrier of the "culture banner" and that "how goes the principal" will be "how goes the school". Each principal does things differently; but due to the nature of the work we do, many strategies and practices are common. Analyzing the practices of these six successful principals and the role they played helped construct some new ideas for myself and others.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

The purpose of the following chapter is to present findings related to research into the issue of school culture. The key question in the research was, "How do principals build positive cultures in their schools?" To research this, the following fifteen questions were asked:

1. What is school culture and how critical is it in a school? Why?
2. What is required for a school to have a positive school culture?
3. Describe the culture of your school.
4. How did this culture come to be? What role did you play as a principal in creating this culture and what strategies, steps, and actions did you take in its development?
5. What roadblocks did you face? How did you deal with these roadblocks?
6. What factors contributed to your success? What leadership strengths contributed to your success?
7. What have you learned and what would you do differently if given it to do over?
8. What leadership qualities do you think principals need the most to build schools with positive school cultures today?
9. How did you involve parents, staff, students and community in developing the culture of your school?
10. Can anybody do what you did? What would they need to do it?
11. What inspires you and what motivates you?

12. What is your personal view on education and how does it translate into the culture of your school?
13. If you were to pick one single factor that would most influence the culture of a school, what would that be?
14. What events and circumstances in a typical school day make you feel good and what make you feel bad? What keeps you going when times get tough?
15. How much time do you spend in your school in a given week? Does it require a lot of extra time for you, your staff and others to build the right climate? What would your school be like if these extra efforts were not made?

In the analysis of the responses to each question, many common factors emerged as each principal described his/her journey in building school culture. These factors are outlined below under separate headings. In my analysis of the data, I found that the flow and cohesiveness of the stories and reflections shared by each of the principals was a critical factor in understanding each of their journeys in building school culture. In an attempt to maintain this flow and continuity, I have organized the findings so that each section begins with a summary of my findings interspersed with or followed by the principal narratives that support the findings. This is also to help ensure that the 'voice' of each principal is heard as accurately as possible.

School Culture

The principals defined school culture as being the environment, the personality of a school, the sense of community, the feeling in a school, the ambience, that which defines a place, the ethos, the thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, traditions and the relationships and interactions between people. One principal described school culture as an "approval system" whereby people affirm their beliefs about themselves. School culture encompasses or reflects what we value or believe.

> **Pamela**
> *The school culture is that which defines a place as you enter into it, as you think about it, as you breathe within the place, as you interact with people from the first person you see to the last person at the end of the day. It's that which really defines the purpose and the way people behave and how they structure their... well the beliefs that they bring to the job are really formulated by the culture of the school.*

> **Justine**
> *Culture is setting an environment that...and developing an environment that meets the needs of your students. It's demonstrating a relationship between the learner and the teacher. It's setting an expectation of richness that they are part of the whole citizenship of the world. It's valuing education and it's valuing the learning experiences that those students come with in terms of how we're going to enrich what they do. It's an approval system for people. It's telling them that you believe in them and helping them to believe in themselves.*

> **Michael**
> *School culture, in my view, has to do with the thoughts, behaviors and traditions, activities, events—the aura and the ethos of a school. It is, in many ways, it's the personality of the school.*

They all believed that school culture was critical to the success of the school because it is made up of the expectations, the values, the beliefs, and the purposes for which the school exists. There was also a sense that a positive school culture was necessary for the overall achievement in a school.

> **Pamela**
> *It is quintessentially important. It is really what it's all about...and that school culture being the very essence of being in that place. What is it this place says to one student and another as they come in? What is it the place says to staff as they enter?...What about visitors when they come in?*

> *What did they sense in the school? What are the norms that are operating? What are the expectations here?*
>
> **Michael**
> *School culture is about student achievement...Student achievement is all part of culture.*
>
> *...we have an obligation I think as educators to have as enhancing, enriching, as positive a culture as possible. The more positive the culture, in my view, the higher the overall level of achievement and success of both students and staff will be.*

What is required for a positive school culture?

Almost everyone agreed that a sense of team existed in schools with a positive school culture. Also a sense of unity of purpose or cohesiveness was described as being critical and that the development of a vision or mission statement was one of the first steps in creating this unity of purpose. Building a team was necessary for the implementation of the vision. The team was made up of the staff and students as well as the parents. The principal was an important member of this team, but the principal needed to be more facilitative than directive and be willing to empower people. The principal, however, had to have the passion and set an example by working as hard or harder than the staff.

> **Pamela**
> *One of the things that I knew was that you have to make sure that you've got enough sense of your vision that the people you really need to be on board and to help, get the vision. And if you don't then you have to work on making it more clearly communicated. And you have to build the large picture team.*
>
> *I think it's that really building...inclusive culture is really important.*
>
> *...we nurtured...we cared.*

> **James**
> *You have to have a vision and forge ahead regardless of the opposition—you bring people on board who can help with the vision. You get people involved—that ownership thing—the kids, the parents, that kind of thing.*
>
> **Matthew**
> *And I believe that it stems from an innate belonging of children that doesn't matter when you go into a school the one thing that has to be established and the very first thing for me is that when I walk in there the staff have to believe, and it doesn't matter if you're a custodian or whether you're the support staff member or you're secretary or a teacher or a principal, you have an equality and an equal right and a belonging in this school. The kids have to feel the same way.*

Empowering staff and having everyone take ownership of the culture was a critical part of building school culture and a critical task for the principal. This involved not only having stakeholders participate in establishing the vision, but also having key stakeholders develop the activities and programs that would help make the vision a reality. The principal had to steer the course, but allow his/her crew members to make the ship work and keep it shipshape.

> **James**
> *Ownership is part of it, you know. And that's the amazing thing, you know. We did have kids who ended up breaking glass and so on indoors, but you know what the wonderful thing was that they would come and tell us that they broke the glass. It wasn't a matter of them being afraid of that they did it as an act of delinquency, they did it and they were smart enough to come and do that—to tell us that it had happened and usually it was an accident.*
>
> *...you have to have your administration on board...I expected them to be as visible as I was.*
>
> *And I've got a loud booming voice and use it when needed to and so that way you got, the kids knew you. I mean when I hear about schools where the students don't know the principal...[when they say the principal] was just the voice on the P.A. And I thought to myself that will never happen as long as I...as I'm a principal. The kids will sure as heck know who I am. I would go into classrooms all the time and we had an informal rule around there that classroom doors were open. You know, it wasn't a supervision thing, I wasn't going in to check on teachers, but ...it's*

> *another way of knowing what the culture of the school is all about and what's happening in the classrooms.*

As indicated earlier a vision or a mission statement was important in building school culture and in order for this vision to be created it had to be developed with the main stakeholders—staff, students and parents. This vision or mission had to be purposeful and based on people's values, beliefs, expectations and the needs of the students in the school. Once the vision was established, everyone needed to be actively involved in ensuring that the work was directed toward the vision.

> **Pamela**
> *I think the school culture grew out of all of those things about what was it we thought kids wanted, what did they need, and how could staff best prepare them for that.*
>
> *And I didn't want to control it all because you couldn't. It was way too big, but boy you had to build a team.*

The physical environment was also a significant factor in school culture. The physical environment had to reflect the vision or mission of the school because the physical space was the first thing people saw when they entered a school. The first message that people received about a school and its culture was from the initial view as they walked through the doors and continued through the hallways. The physical environment also speaks the loudest for the culture as it is the most observable or obvious part of a school.

> **Marylea**
> *We couldn't change the name, but we could change the look.*
>
> *And at that particular time we were lucky because we were able to have money to change the physical plant. I think if we had not been able to change the physical plant we would have had a slightly harder battle.*

Matthew
...and along with school culture I believe that cleanliness and beauty, those kinds of things have to come along with school culture

Pamela
...when we really began to get a sense that we knew what we wanted for a school culture and we could start to communicate it more effectively was when we decided where that school would be located...the physical location. And the sort of architectural renderings and looks started to help us to define.

Justine
I think in terms of culture, I place a lot of value on the environment. I believe in a very clean, responsible and I say responsible environment, in the fact that everything in our school has to be in a way that shows kids or conducts it or is viewed in a way that shows kids that responsibility is important.

Relationships were another important factor in examining and building school culture. When people worked as a team and supported the direction of the school and tried their best to enhance the work of the overall team, then the culture was more positive. Respect and trust were important parts of the relationships that existed in schools with positive school cultures.

Pamela
...and you have to...when you're there...be fully there...and be very mindful...and thoughtful of all of the people you work with. And it's about them not you.

Justine
I think people tell me they feel respected and valued. That they...that their work is needed....What I look for are key people who can monitor and motivate themselves.

And I'm not one that really monitors staff...I don't want to have to be there, you know, right behind you everyday. But you know these are people who are self-motivated, love the culture, and really want to work.

A staff that was optimistic, caring, and competent and believed in supporting the needs of the students, a mission statement or vision that addressed the needs of the students and programs that supported the needs of students were also critical to ensuring that the school culture was positive. Everyone in the school had a job to do and that job was to meet the needs of students. The level to which they did that job determined the level to which the culture would aspire.

> **Justine**
> *So the new teachers were kind of interesting too because, you know, they're like new energized bunnies, all the new teachers. They came out...they wanted to accomplish the world*
>
> [the students] *started to see, well we deserve more and I, I...one of the things I really had to work on with the teachers and the students was—you deserve the same things that* [name of another school] *students get. You're not second class students and....those two science teachers were really instrumental in changing the culture of the school.*
>
> *I think you have to get teachers who do things like travel, in other words, who have a passion in their outside life...Because when they bring that passion to school and share that with students then they can empower students and tell them there's another lease on life. So, you have to have that balance there. I think the engagement of students outside the classroom is critical.*
>
> **Michael**
> *...list what it is that we expect of our students*
>
> *When we began, I shared with staff that a school is more than just discipline by itself, or academic achievement results by itself, it's a combination of things and I said we have to start with a belief system about ourselves as a staff and help to identify what's often referred to as a mission statement or a goal statement...we were able then to start from a perspective that had some unity.*
>
> **Pamela**
> *We're here to give you the best there is. We have excellent instructors...these people have lots of knowledge base but they also had signed up to work in an out-of-the-box place so they had different strategies for getting to kids.*

Effective communication skills were essential tools for principals in building a healthy and positive school culture. The principal's ability to convince people and get them on board was also seen as an essential skill as was the principal's ability to empower people. Everyone agreed that passion for the work, a willingness to work hard, commitment and caring were critical factors that all principals had to have in building the culture of their schools. Principals had to be the carrier of the 'vision' banner; they had to have a 'presence' in the school. They were the ones who had to keep people directed and inspired until the synergy of the culture itself was strong enough to become its own inspiration.

> **Pamela**
> *You have to work with somebody who is a dreamer...and an innovator...and who'll take big chances...and who'll let you do things...we all know really successful schools don't run by just the guy at the top.*
>
> *...it's a commitment beyond the job. This is a dedication...a calling. And I think Lorraine Munroe is right...it is holy work. And you have to have some sense of 'this is way beyond an ordinary job and it's going to demand super extraordinary effort'.*
>
> *We had really big business to do...we were very focused and we were very business like.*

Principals had to be open to ideas and to supporting people who wanted to 'take the ball and run' with an idea that they thought would enhance the school. That meant that principals could not micromanage. Instead, they had to trust people and allow people to make mistakes in order to build a team. Principals also had to deal with the resisters and the incompetent people and provide praise and acknowledgement for those doing a good job or making an extra effort.

Principals had to be teachers because they shared the vision and when working with their stakeholders. They had to support the rationale for change with solid data and research. They also had to have high expectations for themselves and for everyone else. This was all part of the process of getting people on board and setting a direction and that direction had to be one that supported students.

> **James**
> *Well, you have to be prepared to work hard.*
>
> *You have to have that competitive, entrepreneurial spirit and don't want to lose.*
>
> *I was the producer. That's what they would call me—the producer, too. But you know how do you build that sense of community in a school, if you don't work at it yourself and try to be a leader in that kind of community and not just this authority figure or this remote kind of person....We get so caught up in administrivia and so on, all these demands on us...we forget about our clientele.*

Support from outside the school was important. Support from the parents and community and support from the higher levels of administration in the district were needed as well. It was easier if financial resources were made available, but this was not the case in every school.

> **Michael**
> *...a parent community, a school district community, a provincial community of governance that has great regard for education. All of those affect school culture.*
>
> **James**
> *...I thought we would have seed money for what we were doing because we had been asked to revitalize the building. Well, then I get the sorry, but we don't have any money. So now what do I do? Well, I told teachers that anything that had dust or didn't look like it was being used or whatever—it was going to go on the auction block—it was going to be sold. And I scoured that building from one end to the other and identified all the surplus equipment:...we were able to sell it so I generated just under $400,000 in revenue from the sale of equipment and thank goodness we sold it when we did because a lot of what we were using....a few years later would have just been scrap metal stuff. So we generated—we created our own seed money.*

Principals indicated that everyone needed to treat each other with respect and dignity and that it was acceptable to have the professional debates. In fact, these were necessary; but, disagreements were not to be taken personally. People could 'agree to disagree' because disagreements were part of working together, but everyone must be a professional and conduct themselves as professionals to be the best support to students.

> **Michael**
> *A professional educator in my mind is one who constantly looks at progress....we as educators must be progressive with the way in which we view education and to assist our students as best we can to have as great an understanding of themselves and the world around them. A professional attitude is one where you wish to enhance learning...the teaching/learning paradigm is one that is constantly intermixing and interacting with itself and requires a professional overriding attitude that we can constantly improve and get better along the way.*

There also had to be a sense of progress as the changes took place. Change for the sake of change was not good because it would not result in people 'buying into' the change that needed to take place. It was important that principals solicit input about the changes that stakeholders thought needed to happen. One key for a successful transition from old to new happened when the principals focused on the area that was identified by stakeholders as the number one area needing improvement. For example, if discipline was identified as the number one concern, then that should be a number one priority for change. Initial success in changing that area would help establish credibility for the 'new principal' in the eyes of some stakeholders and provide support for further change.

James
I wanted to have [subject] *right away, for instance, I mean there was no* [subject] *curriculum in public education in the province…and if you were going to be a* [focus] *school then you absolutely had to have* [subject] *as part of it and so I mean the old line of, you know, you just steam ahead and usually beg forgiveness rather than seeking permission.…you have to provide what's needed.*

Michael
…it boils down to an education. And education for everyone and I met with the staff, identified discipline as a major area of concern and said we are going to develop a school-wide discipline plan that we will all have active involvement in…that we must see discipline from the same perspective. And so we began to define what discipline means.

It was also important that people felt valued for what they could contribute. Principals had to value the ideas and contributions and to accept what people could give with genuine acknowledgement. Trust and involvement were important factors in building a sense of belonging for everyone. All the principals viewed leadership in a collaborative way. Their philosophy was one of shared leadership as they all recognized they could not do the work alone. The principals believed that once people felt they were involved and treated as equals and felt that their contributions were worthwhile, they had a better sense of ownership and belonging. Principals saw both these factors as critical in developing a positive school culture.

Michael
Well, I think it first of all stems from a professional attitude on the part of the staff which originates to a large degree as well with the leadership. And when I speak about leadership I am not speaking solely of the principal and the assistant principal, but rather the degree to which all staff members have a sense of leadership and the direction of the school.

Students and staff needed to be actively involved in the teaching learning process. Everyone needed to be accountable and responsible for and to themselves and for and to each other in order for the culture to be one of enhancement and growth. The principals thought teachers needed to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic about teaching and genuinely interested in working with students.

> **Pamela**
> *You had to constantly be providing the professional development for staff so they could keep up with the curriculum...and keep up with the needs of the kids.*

> **Michael**
> *If we look at what our role is...our role is not to be there to collect a paycheque. Our role is plain and simple...to be there for students. I very often refer to this as a student-centered culture.*

These principals also thought that programs, traditions and celebrations of achievement and success were critical to building school culture. These performances and celebrations needed to be part of the tradition and life of the school.

> **Michael**
> *As part of a culture you must identify the areas that support celebration and celebration became central to what we were doing.*

Principals' Descriptions of Their School Cultures

To help me understand the work that these principals believed they had done in building their school culture, several began their reflections with a description of how the school had been when they first became principal—the 'before' picture. This then set the stage for their perceptions of how the school evolved under their leadership.

Pamela's school was new so there was no 'before' picture for her to describe. The other schools had 'before' pictures that shared common attributes. These were: physical condition of the plant, appropriate and adequate resources, attitudes and beliefs of the staff and students, student achievement results, behavior and attendance issues, varying levels of knowledge and abilities of staff, responsibility, accountability and ownership.

> **Justine**
> *Well, when I first went to the facility, I went to look at the program...I mean any strong leader or anybody who had aspirations for good programming would have seen all the red flags...no resources, teachers who were not on task, students who had a very laissez-faire attitude about learning and low self-esteem about themselves as learners....And so there were significant issues for me that I could not live with....they had spent approximately $39,000...and I remember this significantly...for text books...in a program that was accommodating maybe a 100 students...and their resource expenditures were the same as* [another very large high school] *who had 1100 students that year...so there were issues in terms of how the dollars were utilized. They did not have a library at all in the school...they had maybe about 500 old books that had been donated and shoved in a room called a library, but nothing that was current or relevant to the programming...teachers in terms of their work came into the school maybe around eight-thirty, nine o'clock...and everybody had coffee for the first hour and a half and then people got to work.* [Students] *were allowed to come into class asleep...teachers had a nap too. So we were doing correspondence...that's what they were doing at the time...did a little bit of marking...a little bit of discussion and that was that.*
>
> *Very much a drop-in centre so you could meet the expectations to get your student financing. Your student financing was controlled by* [the other group]*...they made the decision each month whether the* [students] *would get their cheques or not and it was based on how well they felt the students were* [doing outside of school] *and how well they got along with the* [other association]. *Time—school time was usually taken up by counselors who felt that they really needed to deal with the personal issues that the* [students] *were facing in their lives so in no way were the* [students] *doing anything in terms of developing anger management,* [other] *skills in terms of a formal process, nor were they really learning life skills to be able to take care of themselves....not were they learning anything that would help them get out of the cycle* [school drop-out]

...the school was absolutely filthy. Washrooms were not clean, classrooms were not clean, the classrooms were not orderly

Matthew
[in the beginning]*...I was almost frightened because I had been in there and done some pre-school visits. The previous principal had been going home at ten o'clock in the morning and not showing up again until two in the afternoon and I walked into the rooms to have a look at the school and assembly times...kids were using some terrible language with each other, they were physically hard with each other. When I went into the classrooms there were kids running along the vents and things like that. The mess in the school...the school was not a positive place.*

I went up into a classroom and I walked through the door and it was on the wall it said, "I was here in 19..."...I believe it was 1988, and the first thing I saw was 'fuck you 1982' and then beside it was 'fuck you 1983' and it had been there every year for six years...on the side of the art room wall. But then the graffiti and graphics were like that through the whole school. There was stuff even on the outside of the school. The entire bottom of the school walls were just covered with that kind of stuff.

...there were some good teachers in there who wanted the discipline and attitudes and some of them had cocooned to the point where they were dealing with most of the discipline problems themselves and trying to develop a positive attitude...the kids saw nothing but garbage in front of them or trash talking, that kind of thing and they were allowed to deal with that because the administration was doing nothing about it. And the counseling wasn't doing anything so that you couldn't develop a positive school culture because the kids saw a sewer and they were acting like they were in a sewer.

James
...the school was in danger of being closed that first year that I arrived we had fewer than a hundred grade tens....When I left it was just over 2000.

...it was the school that every junior high sent their [special needs] *students to...and the reputation was terrible, even within the community. And there were only about a hundred grade nines total in the four feeder schools...and half or two-thirds of those kids were picking other high schools.*

So it was very interesting the day I walked into the school for the first time in that June and the kids were parked like gargoyles on the front steps, wouldn't move out of the way to let you into the place. All of the doors that had previously had glass in them had sheet metal or plywood on them.

And when I walked up to those steps I thought to myself that that would be the last time I ever have to challenge a student to go through those doors!!

Walked into the hallways, garbage cans were burning. It was near the end of June and kids were cleaning lockers out, and graffiti was everywhere—it was like your subway sides of what New York subway cars used to look like...Bathrooms were a shambles, I mean prophylactics stuck on the ceiling, you know, all that kind of stuff...so what a challenge that was to go in there.

Michael
...when I went to the school I was asked to be the principal of...it wasn't a school that I had applied on. The school at the time had the lowest rating from our survey results. The student survey results, the parent survey results and the staff survey results were all rock bottom and I recall sharing with the staff that there is an element of optimism when you know that because when you're on the bottom, the only way is up. And I said, "Here we are—we are at the bottom. And so that helps us to frame the direction that we need to go because we can't get any lower than what we have right now."

It was a school that there was a great deal of negativity...the students didn't feel safe at the school, they didn't feel that the teachers cared about them, they felt that there was a lot of fighting going on in the school, there was not great support for the staff from the parents, the parents felt that the staff could do much more than they were doing, the staff felt that the students were, in many cases, very dysfunctional and aggressive and were blaming a lot of this on the parents. So we had a three-ring circus going on where everybody else was pointing the responsibility on someone else.

And in coming into the school, I asked the staff to share with me what they felt were the strengths of the school and interestingly enough, they included themselves in that...they felt that they were attempting to offer a program based on strong direction from staff to support students, yet they were very, very clear that the number one problem...in fact, absolutely every staff member identified discipline...student discipline as the major concern. In regards to a number of other concerns that they identified, discipline was the number one concern.

In meeting with the parent community, the parents identified discipline as a major concern.

The school was one of the last surviving open-area schools and sound was traveling from one cluster area to another. It was a very noisy school and I believe that that as well, interfered with the learning. But more *importantly after looking at all the data results, I began to see that where there was a lot of incongruence was the way in which the various groups were relating to everybody. It seemed that there was, in my view, an external locus of control on everybody's part. Students were blaming teachers, teachers were blaming parents and parents were blaming teachers and so on and no one was wishing to take responsibility and so where do you start?*

For example, social service indicated that this particular community had a higher social service intervention rate that placed us, than most communities. In fact, it was placed in the top category that was only paralleled by some very hot beds of inner city communities even though we were not in the inner city.

The city police told us that there was a higher intervention rate with police services in this particular community than all the communities that surrounded this community.

Over eighty percent of our students were coming from low income families, subsidized community housing—row housing and townhouses and apartments that were built in the area.

...my window of my office looked right out to the front street and one day I'm working on my, at my desk and two parents are battling it out right in front of the school—this is right in front of the...on the sidewalk right in front of the school.

There were drug rings in the community, there was a prostitution ring in the community so the community had, and we found all this out, by the way, by again being very much in communication with those various agencies and organizations of community support.

...over half the students, well over half the students were coming from single parent homes and a very high rate of families on social assistance and so we knew that it was a neighborhood that needed great support.

There were some very tragic stories. One of our students came from a home where his mother had killed his father. She had repeatedly stabbed him and the student returned home from school to see blood just splattered all over the apartment. Some very sad, sad stories. Children who were coming from homes where their parents were dealing in drugs, parents...one of our students...her mother was a prostitute and I remember coming home...or rather going to the home with her because she had forgotten her materials and said that she wouldn't be able to get them because her mother wouldn't let her back in the house and I said that I would go with her and I did and after banging on the door insisting that

> *this girl come in and get her school materials, there was the mom dressed very provocatively in her underwear for work. This was very sad for me as an educator.*

The 'after' descriptions that each principal provided described many common features as well. There were also some differences, but these differences could be attributed to the different focus that each school had identified and to the different needs of each of the school populations. For example, one school was a new concept, had no name, had no place and had to be built from scratch. Two schools were alternative schools that were going into previously existing schools and would be bringing in new populations of students along with a new focus. Three schools had to change the previous culture of the school so that the school would be more supportive and enriching for the existing populations. All of these conditions provided a different landscape for each evolving culture.

The common factors described by the principals in their 'after' pictures were:

1. Student-centered, achievement oriented with a focus on the needs of the students:

> **Pamela**
> *...the school culture had to grow from what the kids were going to...what they needed when they came and what we hoped they...what kind of experience we hoped they would have. And that really began to define it. And we realized it was about transforming kids into the rest of their lives.*
>
> *It seems to me that that which I've alluded to but not named is that we were building a collaborative school culture. That the kid wasn't working alone, we were working with the student to help them assess their needs and then to give them the courses they needed to fulfill those needs...you cannot do it alone.*

Marylea
The culture was a student-centered learning environment where the students had...and the staff...all were part of the...I think basically it was...definitely a shared...where everybody...going down to the custodians...the support staff...were all very, very involved with the school....it was a case of...okay, we need to develop that...how are we going to do it? Right...ask the kids.

Justine
We had a very high accountability system for students...and the expectations in terms of attendance and achievement were also evident in every piece of literature we wrote, you know, every assembly we had...we talked about achievement.

Michael
...School culture is about student achievement." So we highlighted student achievement.

2. Appropriate and adequate resources

James
...I will never forget we had found every kid in the school who thought they had a voice, formed a [group] *and a young guy came in to teach...and he needed a chair and a gun and a whip and then we had formed a band. Well, any kid who'd ever taken band, we lassoed them up and an English teacher who was a tuba player tried to conduct the band and we had a couple of good art teachers so we had some potential for art. But that's how we went and I put in a* [special] *floor in that second year, started to empty out the shops, of course, of their equipment and just did it.*

And that was the way we had to operate. [Name of the Minister of Education at the time] *had a trailer...doing a bit of work in her constituency so I barged in there one day and said, "Minister, I'm going to be offering* [specific subject] *at my school and there's no curriculum for that subject but we'll come forward" and she supported it so I did that with a number of things because it was easier to come that way and go down rather than have to try to perk up through all the layers of bureaucracy for that.*

Well, I told teachers that anything that had dust or didn't look like it was being used or whatever—it was going to go on the auction block—it was going to be sold...So we generated—we created our own seed money.

3. High expectations and standards for both students and staff

Pamela
So, the school culture was one of success and I think that we really felt that there was a strong sense of the purposefulness of being there...

Justine
...and so I think the first thing that I did when I went in was talk about the value of education...I really talked about that education changes not only your life, but the life of [others] *and that my job in the school was to change the life of* [others]. *I really felt that I was not going to make great gains in changing the life of the* [students] *there, but I wanted to show them that there could be another option for* [others].

4. An aura of purposefulness and professionalism

Pamela
And it became for us that which was the purposeful one of 'I am preparing myself for the rest of my life'...it is about transitioning to my success beyond school.

Justine
We take care of things and every person we hire in this school knows that their job is to make a difference for those kids.

5. Celebrations of success

Michael
Over a five-year period of time we were able to engage ourselves as a staff in programs that resulted in the school moving from one polar extreme to the other. So great was the turn around and gains that we were celebrated by being recognized internationally as a school that had made great strides forward.

There was a documentary that was made on the school. It was a documentary on the top schools in North America and we were one of the schools selected...We...five years later, if you can imagine, we went from having the lowest survey results to the highest survey results—student survey results in the district. It was truly an outstanding shift and change, if ever the statement from night to day is true, that was the contrast that we were able to make in terms of growth and improvement.

6. A focus on teaching and learning with everyone actively involved

Pamela
...and the level of work ethic that we wanted to have so strong that kids could not walk away from it untouched.

7. Unity of purpose

Pamela
We wanted to...part of our belief in the culture was that it would also be that which provided the standards and the successes along the way that built the confidence for kids to know that they did have a successful life ahead of them.

8. Commitment, caring, respect, support

Justine
Those [students] *go back to the school. Those* [students] *call me on the phone all the time. They'll call at this office and say, "I need to speak to Justine" because they know that I care. The caring is so much a part of the culture because you'll find that the distressed students...one of the things that they have that we never really pay attention to is the resiliency. They develop that from the age of two. We don't capture it when they come to school. We tend to put them down and tell them they don't fit in the right box. We need to capture that and I think that's what good teachers do in terms of their instruction in the classroom...is look at the strengths that these students bring to school and use those strengths to help them to develop more skills.*

9. A sense of belonging, engagement, community

Matthew
I was there three and a half years. The culture of the school became one of mutual respect amongst the staff and the students. It still had some discipline things because we were still involved in, for instance, kids who were involved in criminal activities outside of school but we had a great relationship with the police and the community, the parent community was supportive, kids could do something wrong in the community they could do their community service hours at the school and it was a positive thing for them.

Pamela
We were really building a whole community working together.

Part of the school culture we were building is that we are...very much a part of this community...

> *...we believed that part of the culture we provided was that it will be challenging for you so that you do want to engage in it. We really wanted them engaged in...they weren't there to mess about. Very much every class they went to was because they had this much to accomplish because they only had this much time.*

10. A sense of ownership

> **Pamela**
> *I think we were very purposeful but it was really supportive like part of the school culture is that we are all in this together.*

11. Competent and knowledgeable staff

> **Pamela**
> *We're here to give you the best there is. We have excellent instructors...these people have lots of knowledge base but they also had signed up to work in an out-of-the-box placed so they had different strategies for getting to kids.*
>
> *We had lots of mentorship going on so that these students had not just the teachers to talk to on a pretty regular basis but they had employers and educators from post secondary. They had some pretty strong role models available to them.*

12. Shared leadership

> **Pamela**
> *It seems to me that that which I've alluded to but not named is that we were building a collaborative school culture. That the kid wasn't working alone, we were working with the student to help them assess their needs and then to give them the courses they needed to fulfill those needs...you cannot do it alone.*

13. Shared values and beliefs

> **James**
> [the culture now] *is one of tolerance and understanding. This was one of the remarkable things that kids still talk to me about. In fact, there's a Sorentino's over in the west end and I just had lunch with* [some people] *and they wanted to go to that Sorento's or Sorentino's or whatever it is and the young fellow, the waitress said, "Oh, one of your former students is the manager here." And she told me his name and I did know that name right away and he came over, he sent coffees, lattes...and so the [others] were quite amazed. And he came over and talked and he talked about the different school cultures. He said he had started at [another school] and*

> *he had been a bad kid and felt doomed. And he said,* "[school name], *you and* [school name] *saved my life." He said now he does* [work] *and he's married with a kid and I mean all that stuff. But he felt he could be himself, he didn't have to play a role there with some of these schools where they have these cliques, you know, the cliques aren't there....Didn't matter if you were gay or straight or black or white or whatever, it was, I mean we had kids who came out in class and nobody ever judged them for that.*
>
> *The glue that kept them together was the focus...and even the kids who weren't great academic kids or didn't particularly appreciate it, they stuck to the academics because they would have been in trouble...they wouldn't have been able to be in* [special activity] *or wouldn't have been able to continue with their* [special] *courses if they mucked around with their Math or English.*

14. Alignment with the shared values and beliefs—the vision

> **Matthew**
> *But mostly the general feeling about kids towards each other was highly positive and kids believed it was their school. When I said to them, "Where do you belong?"...there wasn't one kid, you could bring a stranger into this room and say where do you belong and they would say* [the name of the school].

15. Messaging information about the school in a positive way

> **Justine**
> *Each and every day we make sure that we connect with our teachers and our students...We connect in terms of the messaging...That every message that we write is our school tells you that one—we value you, we respect you, we expect that you're going to respect us and we're going forward in terms of an initiative or something that we want to do to help you make a difference. And then two—we welcome feedback, be it critical feedback that helps us reshape ourselves or feedback of support.*

16. Feedback, monitoring and evaluation in a professional manner

> **Matthew**
> *...the kids were looking at achieving things that they hadn't before. The academics were improving significantly. In the third year we were starting to hit what I would say would be the upper end or the more positive side of performance...academic performance with kids.*

17. Trust and confidence in people's abilities

Matthew
...there were some good teachers in there who wanted the discipline and attitudes and some of them had cocooned to the point where they were dealing with most of the discipline problems themselves and trying to develop a positive attitude

[that had changed from]...*a point where kids at first would tell me to "fuck off". Like I had several kids on long term in-school suspensions....I think we had over 300* [disciplinary] *interventions a month for the first five months of school which dropped within the second year to about 50 and then in the last year we were looking at only about 10-15 interventions a month.*

18. A commitment to progress/accountability for students and staff

Justine
And that accountability system made a real difference. We were telling them we cared, we empathized with the reason why they weren't in school, but they were expected back the next day...we knew if they didn't stay connected, we couldn't help them.

But I think the value system in terms of holding teachers accountable makes a difference in terms of developing a very strong culture for that school.

Matthew
...I set up immediately a program where we look at our professionalism and the teaching standards in our school and we set those standards with staff and I held those teachers to that.

19. Optimism and hope

Justine
We take care of things and every person we hire in this school knows that their job is to make a difference for those kids.

Michael
...we were, regardless of students that came to our school and the homes and families they come from, we had to view ourselves as the engines of hope. Of hope and change...and I said there are many areas around the world that have very, very needy students...and what was central to my observations in schools that were making tremendous gains with students who were considered to be high-risk is a sense of optimism and engagement with the entire staff.

20. A sense that moving forward was urgent and needed doing

Pamela
We went to ten week courses and part of that was we will get you success quickly.

We had really big business to do...we were very focused and we were very business-like.

21. A clean, attractive environment that showcased or reflected the culture of the school

Justine
I think in terms of culture, I place a lot of value on the environment. I believe in a very clean, responsible and I say responsible environment, in the fact that everything in our school has to be in a way that shows kids or conducts it or is viewed in a way that shows kids that responsibility is important.

Marylea
The physical plant...it's critical...let's say it helps the situation ...considerably ...because you have a physical plant that we had changed in color and in design.

22. A belief that the vision would happen

Justine
I spent time with the [students] *that were there because that was what the school was about...I paid attention to the* [students] *and that's what the school was about....I think that the* [students], *you know...after their three years developed a sense that they were very proud of themselves, proud of the program and proud of their learning. And I think that we developed a culture that learning is important...even though we started off with Science 14, you know, today...today is the chemistry exam...there are students in that school who are now writing Chemistry 30. That is very, very powerful to look five years later and see that students are graduating. Last year I went to the graduation...university graduation of one of my first* [students]. *I cried through the whole ceremony, you know, but,* [they] *made it! Because we had a value and a belief system that was very, very powerful.*

James
...Well, any kid who'd ever taken band, we lassoed them up and an English teacher who was a tuba player tried to conduct the band and we had a couple of good art teachers so we had some potential for art. But that's how we went...bit by bit.

How Each Culture Developed: The Principal's Journey

Principals employed several common strategies, actions, ideas and tools in developing the culture of his/her school. The principals:

1. Completed a needs assessment—asked the questions: what is, what needs to be done, what will be?—asked people what they thought—collected data—analyzed strengths and areas for improvement—set targets or goals, listened, observed, discussed, reflected, questioned:

> **Justine**
> *Gathering data, gathering information, putting it together...in a systematic way that I could look at and then going out to other educators and saying you know, "What do you see in this data?" And then bringing back all of those ideas and that information and presenting it to staff in a very strategic manner to get the outcomes that really, that I wanted in terms of putting the school forward.*
>
> *So as we were developing the mission statement and the kind of vision for the school, we talked about that we wanted school to become the nucleus of these* [student's] *lives. So if they had issues in their life that pertained to banking, dealing with their landlord, dealing with daycare, that they should be able to get support, find out the resources that they needed at the school to be able to resolve these problems.*
>
> *...whatever was going to happen, whatever they needed, they needed to be in the school. And then the next thing that we needed to really work on is helping the* [students] *to develop a basic skill set so they themselves could interact appropriately with people in the community and all of these different institutions and agencies that they would have to work with and to develop some basic skills so they could go out and seek employment for themselves. We knew that many of them in that first group were not going to necessarily go on to post-secondary but we wanted to help them to develop some skills so they pursued adult education that they would have a good framework that could see learning as lifelong.*
>
> **Matthew**
> *The physical plant is always one* [change to build culture] *but the second one is to immediately have all ready documents that show that you are starting to initiate for instance a positive behavior plan...and to be able to sit down on the first day of school and say here's some of the things...I do*

> *entry interviews almost exclusively with the staff ahead of time...developing a team attitude.*
>
> *...interviewing all the staff and asking them to come up with the many things that we did that were really good and the things that we wanted to change.*
>
> *I also got a hold of the people who left, they left for a reason...they always gave me a lot of data on the things that were not there....so using focus groups was really a positive, using colleagues was a real positive, also surveying populations—parents, students, etc.*
>
> *...the staff interviews are really critical because staff will tell you, you know, the things that need to change...and for awhile you need to be gathering information...you need to show that you are going to change but you need to be cautious that you're not coming in just ripping down. You know cultures develop in organizations by maintaining the great or the goodness that made them...even the worst cultures had certain things that were maintainable. And in business I know, like my dad was a businessman and he used to always say to me when you change the culture you better not change the heart or the centre part of the culture.*

2. Found out what people valued and believed in regard to education and schooling

> **Marylea**
> *We would sit with them...or I would...and sit with them and say "What do you want to see in your school?" And from that built the whole culture of the school by having a group of them sitting around with us...and the two of us used to do that often...and "What can we do now...this is your school...what do you want to see in that school?" And many of the rules...the regulations...the student conduct...the things that we built...came from those first hundred and sixty-five students. Working with some of the newer staff...I had trouble working with the older staff...but the newer staff who also came in...worked with those students...and we developed the whole culture of the school.*
>
> **Justine**
> *And then I started to look at developing a value system...in the school...I interviewed each teacher individually and asked them what do they value, what do they think were things they wanted their students to have or develop as outcomes of the program in terms of the time they were spending with teachers...where did they see the school going in five years time? What were the community perceptions about the school?*

3. Involved all stakeholders in the creation of the vision or mission statement—focus groups:

    Pamela
    One of the things that I knew was that you have to make sure that your stakeholders know what it is you're trying to do, understand that you've got enough sense of your vision that the people you really need to be on board and to help, get the vision. And if you don't then you have to work on making it more clearly communicated. And you have to build the large picture team...And I think part of it is really having a sense of where you have to go but being open to that being drawn up. I mean, I had a canvas and I knew that there were lots of materials we could paint the picture with but all of the stakeholders wanted to be a part of that picture.

    ...we'd bring [the students] *in the bigger groups and do lots of talking about what it was going to be about and what you could expect*

4. Created a vision or mission statement—unity of purpose

    Marylea
    We had a vision of what we wanted and that original vision began...the culture began when we first were able to hire an initial group of leaders...potential leaders...and then a potential group of staff. We did inherit and keep a dozen of the old staff...that was my particular responsibility...that was where a lot of work had to be done. It was very easy to hire new staff to be able to develop and to let them develop the culture...not us develop the culture...but let them develop the culture that they felt this school needed to have. And that was going to be a culture of students led...environment where the students had a say and were heard...where the staff had a say and were heard...equally.

5. Communicated—clearly, often, honestly

    Pamela
    We started doing different brochures...about questions and answers...and building that.

    ...when we really began to get a sense that we knew what we wanted for a school culture and we could start to communicate it more effectively was when we decided where that school would be located

6. Built team—involved people, acknowledged expertise, valued people, encouraged people, knew that it's wasn't them—it was the team that got the work done:

> **Pamela**
> *...you cannot do it alone. And anybody who thinks they can is going to burn out really early. So one of the biggest things that I had to do was to realize that I had to build a team*
>
> **Marylea**
> *You've got to have people believe in it. You can't just do it yourself. And you can't do a little admin team or something like that. I think one of the biggest differences we did is...and it caused a lot of controversy to start with...is not have an admin team and a faculty council per se. We had a leadership team that was a team and that was equal*
>
> **Matthew**
> *...First of all the cleanliness in getting the physical component had to happen as quickly as you could do it and go on a continuous basis. But more importantly was to begin to bring a feeling of belonging with the staff. Bringing in the staff and getting people on side who were of the same kinds of feelings that you had and could go along with the philosophies that all kids belonged...that they deserved, safety, first of all, no matter if they were coming out of the community, etc., in the school, at recess times, they could be safe.*

7. Behaved in a "mindful" way—modeled, monitored, included, shared, rewarded, acknowledged

> **Pamela**
> *And if someone was having a bad day somebody could see it when they were coming in and somebody was there to check out what was happening in their first class.*
>
> **Justine**
> *...if you value something, you have to monitor it and you have to show people you cared. And then you had to really work with the teachers so they knew it was important for them to stay connected with the students.*
>
> *And the other thing that I used to monitor with the* [students] *was their own personal sense of self-esteem and whether they were depressed or not. It was critical that if you saw depression coming on a young person, that you got help immediately....I hired a psychologist to work with the*

[students] *and I think that made all the difference in the world because she could see when they were clinically depressed and ensure that they got what they needed.*

8. Fixed what needed to be fixed—started with the physical plant if it needed it

Marylea
And to ask the kids...and to ask the students what they think about this...and we developed the principal forum...which was the biggest battle we had to do to help culture there was develop a daily teacher advisory period...where there was a homeroom concept...where all school issues could be discussed...where the students felt they could have a say. And the fact we tried...we had a couple of disasters...but eventually we got a model which is still in effect now...that has been kept going since both of us have left. But that came originally from that very, very first little ideas that we had where you had that culture of everybody feeling that they had a say.

Justine
Two things I worked on immediately...one was the culture of the school in terms of the physical environment...the school was absolutely filthy....and so, I just remember this so vividly, the first thing I did was I ordered two dumpsters to the back of the school. And I spent probably two weeks during the summer just throwing away anything that I could see that I did not think was of value....and so I said we have to have a clean school so we threw and we spent...money cleaning the school from top to bottom because I just felt that students could not have pride in an environment that was not clean, so we did that.

9. Used the physical plant to reflect the culture

Pamela
...the physical location. And the sort of architectural renderings and looks started to help us to define it.

[the facility] *was the key...It had to smell different. It had to look different. It had to have a different touch to it...as soon as you could show kids even the site...or parents...as soon as you had a visual it begins to help*

...we built a collaboration team room for the staff where all of their desks were and their computers and their storage. So they always came in to that place to start their day and during their breaks. There was so much natural being together and talking about lesson plans. The professional conversations were very rich and the dialogue flowed very informally.

Marylea
...the general office when we renovated the office...the best thing we ever did was knock all the walls down...make it a communal one...yet kids were in there all the time...staff were in there all the time. It was very open...there was an open communication between all the administration that was there...there was no talk down. It was very much we were all working at this together. Any issues we had...during the strike...there's a prime example...I was principal then...a potential strike was...okay, let's be together...let's have a meeting...what are we going to do with it?

10. Worked hard, demonstrated what they expected

Justine
I felt when I came to the school that nobody respected the school and people would make silly little jokes about [students] *and I think I used a lot of the data, a lot of research that had come out of the States or from Toronto in terms of looking at the work that had been done with* [these kinds of students] *and then I looked at the work at disadvantaged students because I see, saw the two things similar, in the same similar fashion.*

11. Worked with passion—let people see the passion

Justine
So, in the first staff meeting we spent a lot of time talking about the values and what we want to accomplish and the expectations I had for myself and how they were going to be part of those expectations.

Matthew
...you need to talk to them to give them your visions and through discussions and actions they begin to bring some of their own unique ideas and they excel

12. Were purposeful, presented ideas for change with a solid rationale and data to support the rationale

Justine
And then I thought, you know, out of looking at all that literature...what can we do to make a difference for young people? So when I started to put forward that value system and to demonstrate the achievement and to celebrate the achievement of these [students], *people started to look at the school in a very different manner. And I wouldn't allow people to make bad jokes about* [the students], *no matter if they just thought they were being cute. I tried to show them there was a different side of that and I would say to this day, people now really respect that work that is done in that school because we have accountability for ourselves and teachers.*

Matthew
But you have to be careful sometimes in making points with people. You have to have the data, research to support what you are suggesting. You have to be careful that you don't scar people so badly in the first, especially really good people, by changing things without showing them the research...I believe that change is cognitive and that we need to be coaching—cognitive coaching. People honestly have to believe and understand some of the changes...so they can buy into it.

13. Built an identity, got people excited

Marylea
I think the biggest thing to me was it was our vision...but it became the vision of that first graduating class...They were not rocket scientists...these were not the bright kids...we didn't attract the bright, bright kids that first year. But we attracted the ones that believed.

At the end of the first year....by then we had all the sports stuff...we had school-colored spirit wear stuff we could take...we had begun a bit of identity...but these kids were the sellers.

Matthew
The physical plant is always one [one change to build culture] *but the second one is to immediately have all ready documents that show that you are starting to initiate for instance a positive behavior plan...and to be able to sit down on the first day of school and say here's some of the things...I do entry interviews almost exclusively with the staff ahead of time...developing a team attitude.*

James
And I would tell the kids, you know, one of my things is I would drink a lot of Pepsi-Cola. I was a Pepsi guy and I kept a mini-fridge in my office and had a sofa in there and what not and one of the things I like to do at the beginning of the year is have assemblies and both of my schools had never had a history of assemblies...but I wouldn't do one big assembly, I'd bring them in by grade...and so then, I'd set mikes up in there so that the kids could come and ask questions. I would tell them the story of the school and what not and try to teach them theatre etiquette at the same time because we didn't want that wonderful old theatre abused.

14. Got people to help—encouraged involvement

Pamela
...the people that are working with you have to know what you're thinking and where it's going...you'd meet a couple times a week to talk about where you and what's next...you kept building that team of instructors and

staff and then those people you kept bringing them together so they were part of the creation.

Matthew
...empowerment cannot, it has to be a Covey-like...but I truly believe that he's one of the few people that actually believes that staff have a right to involvement and that when you involve everyone even parents and kids in change that they will become part of, as I said, almost a covenant or a mystical belief about the school and its energies and its possible potential.

15. Hired people to help

Marylea
We had a vision of what we wanted and that original vision began...the culture began when we first were able to hire an initial group of leaders...potential leaders...and then a potential group of staff. We did inherit and keep a dozen of the old staff...that was my particular responsibility...that was where a lot of work had to be done. It was very easy to hire new staff to be able to develop and to let them develop the culture...not us develop the culture...but let them develop the culture that they felt this school needed to have. And that was going to be a culture of students led...environment where the students had a say and were heard...where the staff had a say and were heard...equally.

16. Were tough when they needed to be

Justine
And after we started to work with the science teachers, we had to work on the dead and the dying teachers and they were the ones who were probably the toughest because they had no expectations for themselves, our district had done a very good job of finding them a job where nobody was going to be confrontational to them and so they were used to doing their own thing. And here comes this young principal and who the heck does she think she is that she's going to tell us now that we need to have lesson plans and that they're going to be teaching a class instead of correspondence because, don't you know, these **[students]** ***can't read. So I said they can't read old, dirty, torn, tattered books, but I said if we had some meaningful literature for them to read and teach them to read...then reading would become meaningful. So that was the kind of approach that we did...took with those teachers.***

...the value system in terms of holding teachers accountable makes a difference in terms of developing a very strong culture for that school.

Michael
...when you as a principal arrive in September, you have the staff that you have. And what I promised the staff, I said, first of all we're either part of the solution or part of the problem. And that the community is a very unforgiving community. You have to be at the top of your game and professional game and I said I have an expectation of myself that I would be working at the one hundred percent level and I asked everyone to view themselves from that perspective as well and that at the end of the year if they gave it their best, if they gave it their very best and felt that this was not a school that they wished to continue in there need be no shame, they could come to me and in their presence I would call personnel and indicate that this staff member deserved an opportunity to go to another school and let somebody else come and have the challenge of great change. It was something that we all had to engage in and feel that we were...we could manage and overcome any of the problems that we faced.

James
So when I walked in, of course, I mean the teachers, I said, "This is going to be an [focus] *school"....and of course, I had all the old guard with the blinders on which is the usual thing and saying "How come everything is fine until you got here?" But my vision for the school was it was going to be a school, a school with a...focus and with a strong academic program because that's what those...kids tend to be, I mean they have to know, both sides of them there, and of course parents initially they'd say to me "Well, you know I'd like my daughter to be here...but she's a good academic student..." so you knew what you had to do very, very quickly. But I wanted it to be a school for children of all ages and that was certainly the vision and so certainly for those first few years well I had to, I had to move programs out and bring programs in very quickly.*

...when I walked into the school it had nearly a million dollar deficit. My predecessor didn't identify anybody for transfer at the end of the year even though they knew the numbers...so when I walked in and I realized what the staffing situation was, the first week of school I identified teachers for transfer and then they didn't get placed. They leave these people wandering around the building so I had to phone and raise hail Columbus with [senior administration] *and said, "What are you trying to do to me? Are you trying to do me in right off the bat?" Because these people were all wringing their hands and crying and all the rest of it. Teachers can be unrealistic, it's not like they're laid off and pink-slipped and on unemployment. It just means they get transferred to another location. Somehow they take it as an attack on them and that they, you know, they've lost their job. Well they haven't lost their job, they've just lost the location they're working in which I know is hard and even harder when they don't know where they're going.*

...and so I brought consultants in to look at the cleaning staff and the building. So I let twenty-five cleaning staff go also...I eliminated the night shift, let go the charge hand in the daytime.

So along with that—imagine—then I talk about the vision—well imagine having to deal with that and getting the staff and the community and the kids excited about the future while you're doing all of this hacking away at staffing and selling the equipment out from underneath them and all the rest of it. And telling department heads you're not going to be department heads anymore...and assistants under them...there was this huge management level. No wonder they had a monster of a deficit.

There was no support whatsoever for the vision. By the end of the first year because I have to tell you this part of the story. At the...because I don't think any principal, maybe in this province, has had to deal with what I had to deal with that year, by the end of the year I had to release 49 staff. And imagine on May 15, or whenever they did they surveys...the deadline for declaring staff at that time was quite a bit earlier then it is now...I had to let another 21 go or something like that and then the next day had to administer the district survey. "Do you think your school is a good place to work?" "Do you have confidence in your principal?" And so on...it was a blood bath.

It was a bit of a hostile environment but in spite of that we got moving.

Matthew
...if they're just out of sync with the attitudes and culture they might survive in somebody else's school, but they're not going to do well in your own and you help them move to other locations.

...but then you begin to evaluate that five or six percent of the teachers who are just not good teachers...not good teachers in general. I set up immediately a program where we look at our professionalism and the teaching standards in our school and we set those standards with staff and I held those teachers to that. And in each school I've been in I've removed teachers...I believe firmly that we have to be part of our own culture and part of it is confidence that kids and parents have in you as an administrator and you can't have abusive teachers...they cannot be there.

17. Carried the banner for the vision

Michael
We had a school song, we highlighted intramurals, we highlighted achievement—the assemblies were a time for celebration. We also celebrated new growth in the community. We had these T-shirts, baby T-shirts, with our school logo on them. And if somebody had a new member

in their family—a new baby in their family—we would ask them to the assembly and present the new baby with their first school T-shirt...and to hear the applause every time a new baby would come in we would introduce them "Here is a new member of our community and in five and a half years, a new member of our school!"

18. Established ways to 'enculturate' people—retreats, etc.

Marylea
But the other part, and go right back to the very beginning...something that I think was key to building the culture...was the very first...with our new staff we hired...with the old staff we had...we had a retreat...an overnight retreat before school started...at the end of August. And I think, without that, we would never have had the first step on building what was the culture. The next thing that came of course were the kids that came in through the doors that September...and then we carried on. But that first retreat...we developed what we felt was the most important thing...these homerooms...this particular time where all kids could belong to some significant person for the whole year....the belief was that this was going to be the central piece of the school. The students centered in this...so we spent the whole two days...were initiated as [school mascot name]*...we went through what was going to be the base of this teacher advisor. So for a day and a half we did what the staff...and this was all staff...what each teacher was going to do in their homeroom class. The support staff was there...they knew what was going to happen...so they were able to support it.*

Justine
And one of the things that I started to do in terms of our staff meeting was every staff meeting we talked about the culture of the school, where we wanted to go, what we valued and what was the next step in terms of our learning that we needed to have in order to make a difference for the students so as we were planning professional activities for our students to do we always planned some activity for us to do in terms of our own teaching so we spent a lot of time looking at curriculum because even though they were teaching English, they had no idea what the curriculum was. So we spent a lot of time doing that and we spent a lot of time looking at instructional strategies...how do you teach reading? How do you help students to develop study skills...all of those kinds of aspects of learning that took place.

19. Supported professional development that people needed to do their work

Justine
And we took...kind of the statement...that learning is for life and that became our kind of mission statement for the school...a very simple one

and we decided that we were going to have to model that ourselves as teachers in order to help our students be engaged in the same way...and I was really pleased that we as a staff came about that value system and looking at the mission statement because I knew that these teachers needed significant professional development in order to see themselves as educators...my goal was to make them marginal teachers or exceptional teachers...and so I had the half-dead and the dying and I was able to get some very bright, talented new teachers, and so, trying to bring them both together and uplift their skills I think was very important.

Matthew
They had a right to come to school and we had a responsibility to educate them and do our very best, but in return they had certain responsibilities also. And you had to begin to inservice your staff and develop, have staff members who believed in those. So a lot of professional development days on looking at connecting with the kids, then also following it up in that late first year beginning to look at the actual curriculum and saying we've got the kids behaving to a certain level but then you have to follow through with their control and their being responsible for their behavior and learning. And then at the same time the positive interaction with peers and adults.

20. Dealt with the resisters and the incompetents

Justine
So I remember distinctly having conversations with two teachers who took the time to come and see me in my office and sit down and give me all the yeah buts, about what a great meeting it was but why some of my values and my visions would not work within the school. And that told me more about them then it did about what I was going to accomplish....and so they told me how the [students] *were never going to come to school, the place was never going to stay as clean as I wanted, why was I going to buy new books because they're going to lose them anyway, they'll move and the books will move...*

...well I said that was in the past...that was before Justine. I said now this is after Justine....so after we had the first meeting and we started to work together, we started to set up a framework one by one about how we were going to engage students. And we started with Science because that was where I had two new teachers....and so...we bought some microscopes, we bought some lab coats, we cleaned up all the benches and bought a couple of very interesting, but very basic science books....I'll never forget it and when it was finished it was just like a show class.

21. Acknowledged the supporters

Matthew
...one of the ways to do that is to give away power. You see empowerment in allowing people to take over things and allowing them to truly do that...make decisions, spend money, set up your entire staff so they accept more responsibility and when they do they're rewarded for it. In other words if you're going to ask someone to take over something you have to sometimes sit back and let them make mistakes that are there, bite your tongue and encourage them with what they've done.

...parents need to feel they can walk into the school....parents feel like it's their school.

...there's probably twenty percent of your staff are really top caliber people and you need to talk to them and give them your visions and through discussions and actions they begin to bring some of their own unique ideas and they excel.

22. Empowered people and let them make mistakes

Justine
I looked at teachers as leaders and I really helped to develop the leadership skills of some of the strong teachers that I had there so not only were they leaders in the school, they were seen as leaders in the community at large and then the school community within our district. It was really interesting that when the [district] *teachers disbanded and they went back to* [the district], *every one of them went back as a department head to their district and I was very pleased about that because they had developed a set of skills in terms of their knowledge of curriculum, instructional strategies, engagement of students that was recognized in their district and they stay as leaders today.*

23. Made time for discussions and dialogue—allowed for and often encouraged differences of opinion as part of the discussions:

Pamela
I think one of the biggest tasks of someone in this kind of transformational effort is being a terrific listener...and also being able to sort the material. And reflect like crazy...listen, write, think and then go back and ask some more questions after you've reflected and get lots of people's input....you really have to get as many ideas into it as you can. But it cannot be a free for all. You have to keep centering on what it is, where are we going, what does this look like, what do we have to have.

24. Celebrated successes and had fun together

Justine
...high expectations in terms of attendance and achievement...evident in every piece of literature we wrote...every assembly we had...we celebrated every experience they had...we gave them a certificate for every course they completed...personal letters at the end of the year...I spent a lot of time on their report cards. I'd write copious notes on their report cards.

Matthew
...and of course developing the rewards or the awards system that go along with it...the "Diamond of Distinction"...having kids getting rewards for being responsible so big time recognition, especially in inner city areas.

Michael
In the beginning, the first year, if you would believe this, absolutely every class received walking lessons. That became part of our discipline, teaching pro-social behavior. Every classroom, kindergarten through grade six taught the students to walk down the hallway without hitting each other, without running...because in the first couple of weeks, I couldn't believe it...people were running everywhere...as they run they bump, they push, they do all of these things. So we talked about that and I would go into the classrooms and I would share another 'teachable moment'. "Guess what I learned today? Everybody runs in the hallway and lots of people are pushing. Well, let's ask ourselves what we must do to make supportive change so everyone can be safe." And so we began to focus on each of these things and as I said it didn't come from any canned character education package, you don't need a book to tell you that you're kids are running in the hallway—and so then we began to practice, practice, practice walking. Every Friday for five years we had school-wide assemblies, that was how far we had come.

25. Established traditions, activities, events that supported the vision

Justine
Over the period of the next two years, I think, the other thing that I really worked on was bringing the services to school. It really became a model school in terms of having....services. And then the other thing that I became very skilled at was when a [student] *had a very serious case in which* [they] *needed support from legal services, I would phone all the law firms and ask for pro bono support, and do you know there wasn't one firm in town that refused the services to these* [students] *and I was always very pleased about that....And so I think the one-stop service is really important and I really kept that in the hands of the school.*

Matthew
...connecting with parents, so positive phone calls home help build culture...we try to do an average of five to six phone calls at least to a parent or visits in the hallway where they've actually connected with the parents or sat down after school with them.

...we used the Phoenix as our big theme/mascot...you have to get kids to belong and begin to be part of the theme that sort of shows their beliefs and shows their belonging and we used the Phoenix which was sort of the rising out of the ashes was this beautiful phoenix bird and we had it in three dimensional on the walls and we had it in our attitudes. Like, we belong to [name of school], *be kind and helpful, celebrate differences.*

James
[in order to personalize things with students] *You know who your stinkers are and who your stars but you don't know the rest of the kids and so I wanted to set up a what I called a 'reading period' initially and everybody, the staff, the administration, kind of groaned and said "here we go again." But I'm telling you that we started the reading period and everybody in the school in the mid-morning stopped for fifteen minutes and read and we expected everybody in the place to be reading from the principal to the office, custodial staff, teachers and everybody. And some of the kids who had problems reading and that may not always bring reading books, but they were reading something too. And when I saw how that worked—you could have heard a pin drop in a big school like that—then what I wanted to do was add another five minutes to it so we called it reading/advisory period so that during a week then there would be time when a teacher would communicate with kids on what was happening in the school. Some teachers were very good at it, lots of them were adequate and then there were a few, of course, that were hoping that let's close the door...and let's hope the administration doesn't catch us...overall it worked very well.*

Michael
We posted works, academic works, works of art all over the school—well, in fact, everything that was interesting, outside every classroom, because in the past, as I mentioned, it was an open area school and we began to put walls up and bring the school around to a more traditional school where the noise, the hum of work would not be interfering with other people's work. And so outside every classroom as well, we put up a bulletin board called 'A window to the classroom'—a window of success. And each month each staff member committed themselves to changing the bulletin board and filling it with the examples of work and the success that was taking place in those classrooms. And so that's again just a small...a small thing that was being done but it added...everything is kind of like a

layer upon layer of success. And the school began to see itself in a very unique way.

On a day to day basis over the intercom, first thing in the morning, Monday was Monday morning's sounds of the planet earth. I would play a particular sound to the students over the intercom at the conclusion of the announcements and the students would have to, each class would have to guess what was the mystery sound, it could be anything from a loon calling on a lake to a toilet flushing. It was really interesting—we had these wonderful sounds. Tuesday was Canadian Content Tuesday and we would ask a question on Canada. The students would always submit there answers. Every class participated in this. Wednesday was Witty Wednesday, I would share a couple of jokes to conclude. Thursday was "Thoughtful Thinking Thursday"—I would read either one of Aesop's fables or some kind of thoughtful thinking phrase, poem that would get students thinking about humanly positive themes, or something about science and nature and then Friday's we would have Famous Amos Trivia Question of the week and it would be again an interesting question for example: some professions walk a lot, other professions sit a lot, others professions stand a lot and based on some fact that we had uncovered from for example the Canadian Podiatry Association what profession in Canada walks the most and you have a choice of a teacher, a nurse, a mailman, a police officer. And often the staff were as interested in this as the students and a question like that you'd think it would have to be a mailman, but not according to this fantastic fact, it is actually on average police officers walk more than the other three—on average they walk the distance from here to Vancouver and back in the course of the year and so it was just a wonderful fun thing that students were engaged in and learning all the time. And then of course our weekly assembly; and of course, we started every assembly off with a proud recognition of the national anthem

26. Planned strategically—realized timing was critical to success so they had a plan that would get people involved and supporting the direction of the school in a way that resulted in the majority coming on board without resistance.

Justine
Then the next thing I did was spend a lot of time planning the very first staff meeting that I would have with the staff and talking about bringing together some documents that told them that they were professionals...so I started looking at... materials at that time...the role and responsibilities of teachers...the role and responsibility of the superintendent, the role and responsibility of the principal, so everybody had a clear expectation about that.

Well, I think...our role is to be a good observer, good observer, good listening skills and strategic planning. And I think that I was able to do lots of strategic planning because I had the support of [the superintendent] *who always said, "Go for it. I'm behind you."*

Staffing is critical [to school culture]*...staffing is the most critical issue that has to remain with the keeper of the vision who is the principal. I do not believe in group consensus or picking your best friend or your person that teachers feel are the best. I think when you are the observer of the entire school, you know all the pieces of the puzzle, you know the skill set that you want to have in the school to enhance or augment the skill set of other people in the school. You do not want a school of high flyers because they will all fly into one another. You know, you want a range of skills within that school that will compliment the different learning styles that the students have.*

Matthew
...if you read Hickman's and Silva's The Entrepreneur *they talk about sacred cows and that you can't change those especially right away and you know and schools are no different than businesses, you change them in business and you lose the bottom line, in schools you lose support from the community, the kids, the parents.*

I think that risk-taking says that there are certain sacred cows that may in fact be counter productive....I believe we have certain myths in education that people believe and sometimes you have to cut those. And you have to be careful how you do it and timing is everything in those kinds of situations....it's the timing and how you it.

Michael
So in looking at what it was that was required, I started with the perspective that, if we are to improve we must identify what are the target areas to improve upon. And rather than just looking at one I collected as much information and data as I possible could. Data from the student survey results, the staff results, the parent survey results, the achievement results, the communication that I had with parents, the School Council, the communication that I had with the staff. I asked each staff to...list for me the areas of strength of the school and those areas that were in need of improvement.

...I said we have to start with a belief system....So I asked the staff the question, "Do you believe in student-centered education? Do you believe that the reason why we are here as a staff if because we are here to support students?" And, of course, everybody said, "Well, of course, that's why we're here." And I said let's start to draft a belief statement

for ourselves. Is [name of school] *a student centered school, and the answer was a unanimous 'yes' so the first line of our belief statement said* "[School] *is a student-centered school". Do we believe that each and every day students should be able to achieve to their ability level and develop a positive feeling of self-worth... Well, staff said 'yes' so we put that into our belief statement. Well, how do we do that? We went further to say, "Is a student's sense of self-worth associated with achievement in school and other areas?" "Yes." So that then was embodied on our statement as well. "We can meet the needs of students by meeting the universal needs of all students which are: Number One: Students have a need for competency and achievement; Number Two; Students have a need for safety, security, order, harmony and discipline; and Number Three: Students have a need for positive, personalized interaction with peers and adults."*

So once we had targeted those three areas, then we began to go back to each one of those and ask ourselves, "What is it that we can do to enhance the students' need for competency and achievement? What can we do to enhance the students' need for safety, security, order, harmony and discipline? What can we do to enhance a student's need for positive, personalized interaction with peers and adults?"

And we began to view this from the perspective of not simply agreeing with this, but then matching activities and events that would be in association with these.

I said, "Let's look at framing and mapping out our school culture. School culture is about student achievement." So we highlighted student achievement. What do we know about student achievement? What would the data tell us about student achievement? Student achievement is all part of culture.

Number two, discipline is a domain as well, just like achievement... it can be viewed specifically by itself, but it's of course, interwoven with everything else that goes on in a school, but we identified discipline as a domain.

We identified school traditions, activities, and events as another area and I referred to that as, for lack of a better word, as school climate. Although school climate and culture is everything, it was what is the culture and climate of our traditions, or our activities and events of highlighting students and their accomplishments.

Another area was staffing, another area was, first to go back to staff, did we have the right selection of staff to meet the needs of our students?

Another area was facility, was our facility in keeping with, and as I mentioned we were an open area school and were there some things we needed to change in our facility and, of course, the last area was budget—our finances—did we have enough money?...and at staff meetings we would go through these as to where are we today, what do we know about each of these areas, what is it we think we can do with what...from where we are, and where would we wish to go?

And so it was a model that was based on progress, enhancement and change. But targeting each one of those.

27. Kept things in balance in regard to what to prioritize at school

Justine
...if you value something, you have to monitor it and you have to show people you cared. And then you had to really work with the teachers so they knew it was important for them to stay connected with the students.

...we had to change that paradigm in terms of how we developed courses...that their homework assignments that students could do at home, that they could hand in things late, really worked in terms of helping get things on the computer so it was easier for students to catch up...did a lot of study sessions at lunch time because there were very few extra curricular activities so we really encouraged teachers to work with students when they were there not only in the class time but any extra time that we had.

Matthew
...and giving people time off so they don't burn out especially in high needs schools...give those people rewards and positives so that it strengthens their belief in what they're doing, it gives them that little extra kick...it makes them feel appreciated and they in return give you that back ten-fold with the kids and the parents.

You see I still believe that the one thing of what we know about that in order to be invigorated whether it be in business or education and to keep positive cultures you have to change and people have to be part of that change. The other aspect is allowing people to input in that change and you see I think that your staff, there is always an innovative, creative group of staff members who will look for change. I think you have to encourage that, support it whether it's academic or whether it's safety, etc.

28. Were prepared to work as long as it took

Matthew
...the very first thing I felt I had to do was get the building back in shape over the summer. And the assistant principal who was coming in with me...we spent, we took out six three-ton truckloads of garbage out of the school. Stuff that was just strewn around—papers, furniture that was broken and started to clean it up.

...we got some people from the city to do a caustic burn of the bottom four feet of the school to get rid of all the graffiti, etc. We started to look at the classrooms and repaint. You know it became almost a five-year plan to be able to change that.

29. Made sure the messaging about their school was accurate and enhancing

Matthew
[the vision] *was that all kids could learn and all kids should be active participants in their learning.*

So you know developing first of all as a team, inservicing on what it is and then following things to the letter, the consistency is just so important.

30. Let people dream the dream with them

James
I walked hundreds of families through that school. I never took more than a week or two weeks maximum holidays in all the sixteen years I was there. And in those first few years and I'd tell people, and they still tease me about it, as I'd say "Put on your rose colored glasses and dream with me." Because when they saw this horrible facility and silver fish and all the rest of it, you know, I'd say, "You know, [focus] *people don't expect everything to be shiny and beautiful and new."*

31. Either had or developed a thick skin—paid attention to what was important and let the rest go

Michael
...so we began to look at each of the six targeted areas. Because discipline was so salient a concern I identified that right first and foremost because if students don't feel safe, did not feel secure then we needed to do something about that and I remember after the first six weeks of school meeting with the staff and saying we must make a major shift in support to the students in the area of discipline because every single...for the first six week...six weeks...students were getting beaten up at recess time, before school, after school and we were constantly involved with students on a disciplinary basis based on fighting and if you want to be an unpopular principal double everybody's supervision time. Well after six weeks

everybody's supervision was doubled and I said to the staff that I did not request and require them to have double supervision because I wanted them to be happy with me, but rather that it was based on again our belief statement. Were we a student-centered school? If we were, then the students needed more of us, not less of us and I said, "Ask yourself the question would you have your child here?" And when the staff went just deathly silent I said, let us just accept you would not have your child here because of the problems we face.

32. Were a definite presence in their school

Pamela
And always I was there and the admin team was there in the morning to say 'good morning'... 'how are you doing'...Also, there were two stairwells kids could go up in the morning and staff joined admin in being there to welcome kids. And I know that that began to build a community of... 'we expect you to be here on time, but guess what...we're here ahead of you and we're waiting and we're glad you're here.'

James
I attend, usually attended every performance of every production. So there might be a show that was on six nights and I was there six nights and the matinee in the daytime and the kids knew where you were sitting or if you changed seats, they'd be looking to see where you sat. And I would poke my head in when they were warming up for the show and at intermission I would go down and see what the kids were doing in the band, the orchestra pit, and so on...people seemed to appreciate that.

33. Were genuine—believed that what they were doing was the best work that they could do

Justine
I did some reading in terms of working with [other students who had the same needs] *and then I decided to throw that all out and I said okay, I understand a little about* [the issues the students faced], *but I'm going to learn a lot on the job, I said what I need to understand is how to engage young people in good programming and how to make it meaningful to come to school...and look at the issues and the barriers that get in the way of these* [students] *learning.*

...because they know I care. The caring is so much a part of a culture...

Michael
I just received last week an email from a student at the school at the time who is now finished high school and he just wanted to let me know that

> *that was a period of his life that he thinks fondly about to this day. And he just wanted to let me know that it was just an absolutely wonderful experience, school experience for him and that he appreciated everything that we did as a staff to make his schooling an interaction of great excitement and positive engagement and he just wanted to share that with me.*
>
> *...I would talk to one of the members of that staff and it's interesting...they see that school and their involvement as their proudest moment...and everyone that I've talked to see themselves, see those five years that we worked together as a team, as the highlight of their career. We did good work together as a team.*

34. Were hopeful and optimistic

> **Justine**
> *...the kids were very interesting...I think the nice thing about* [name of school] *at that time we were on a very informal basis...so all the students would call* [the teachers and me] *by our first names...and they came in and they said, "Whoa, you're actually going to teach us something...we're used to doing distance learning...we're used to working at our own pace." And so we said, "Well, have you finished anything working at your own pace?" "Well, not quite, we're doing Science 14 for the second time because, you know, we missed a couple of lessons." And so the teachers were very engaging and we were able to bring the* [students] *on side in terms of doing science together and we started to work...we had expectations. We had the start time at nine thirty rather than at eight thirty or nine o'clock because it made more sense for the* [students]....*and it was really neat to see them grow and develop a really strong relationship with teachers...it wasn't just that I came to ask a teacher a question if I didn't understand what was happening in the textbook* [which is what happened with distance learning]. *We were talking about science in the real world and how science affects our lives.*
>
> **Michael**
> *...we were, regardless of students that came to our school and the homes and families they come from, we had to view ourselves as the engines of hope. Of hope and change...and I said there are many areas around the world that have very, very needy students...and what was central to my observations in schools that were making tremendous gains with students who were considered to be high-risk is a sense of optimism and engagement with the entire staff.*

35. Were cheerful even on the days when you didn't want to be

Michael

...I shared earlier as part of a culture you must identify the areas that support celebration and celebration became central to what we were doing. We must celebrate our accomplishments, our strengths and so I recommended a school-wide assembly once a week.

Right after school opened in that first year...some found it hard not to laugh at this suggestion and I said, I'm not sure what the joke is and they the staff just said well, it could never happen. And I said, well it will never happen unless we make it happen.

And so the end of the first week came and I hosted the first end of the week celebration by hosting a school-wide assembly in the gymnasium. And I still remember very vividly coming into the gym and you've got a gym full of students and all the staff members glued to the back wall and students grabbing at one another, pushing one another, poking one another, yelling at one another and I could not intervene at all because there were no pathways for me to go anywhere other than this solid mass of students. So with the strength of the microphone I raised my voice loud enough to get the attention of the students and indicated to them that I, their new principal had just received a teachable moment. I said, "You know that each and every day on the announcements I say that we must have a good day and good learning—that every day should have a teachable moment."

And I think that they listened only because it was strange that the principal would say thank you for teaching me something. "You have just taught me that we have to work on school-wide assemblies because nobody here knows how to conduct themselves in a school-wide assembly. And I just learned that and I thank everyone of you for teaching me that! I now am much wiser than I was prior to the assembly. And I said as a result the assembly is now OVER. Teachers please take your students back to your room and then I said there will be a staff meeting right after school today"...there it was three-thirty on a Friday afternoon we're in for our staff meeting and I said, "You are absolutely right. You knew a week ago when I brought it up and when you smiled...and some of you laughed...that these students know nothing about behavior for school-wide assemblies. We are so much wiser now than we were an hour ago because it is very clear some of the reasons why we had what we had. First of all there is no organization, there were no expectations. I couldn't intervene and neither could you...because everyone of you was glued to the back wall...everybody was facing me so who was responsible for all the students? Well, appearance wise it would be the person who was at the front. But is it...does it make sense that one person would be able to control hundreds of students? No, so we are going to make a list for ourselves as a staff as to what it is we expect of our students. How do we expect them to come down the hallways. How do they enter the gym?"

So we listed what it would be...I said, "Envision a school-wide assembly at it's best—what would it look like. How would the students be seated? How would they behave?" So we set up the expectations and we practiced with the students.

From that moment on for the next five years we had an assembly every Friday afternoon. We had visitors from our district from right across the country coming to view our assemblies because they had heard about our assemblies and couldn't believe that we could host such an event every Friday last period of the day.

36. Maintained a sense of humor

James

People were really intrigued by it....So the media was intrigued by us.. I'll never forget the line in the Sun "[name of school] *to out-fame Fame"—that was the sitcom at the time and so on and, of course, I would say, oh, those naughty media people doing that kind of stuff, of course, I was finding my own way to feed this information to the media all the time. And you know it really got people in the community, a lot of people interested and excited—they wanted their kids to go to a Fame-like school.*

I had this line that I started at [another school] *about kids being in the hallway. "I'd better be able to fire a cannon down the hall and not hit a soul."...well, it's been a line ever since. That's a line the kids wanted me to use all the time.*

Michael

Every Friday afternoon, last period of the day to close the week. We would have a school-wide assembly and we had presentations from classes, musical productions, sometimes guest speakers, we'd have this thing that we called "Surprise me I've got a sense of humor". Students would have a choice of, after a super student ticket was pulled out of the box, that student would have a choice of these ten cards—five of the cards would have a gag gift on them such as a roll of toilet paper or a potato peeler or a lump of dirt and others, we got wonderful donations from corporate sponsors, I mean, there was everything from basketballs to, in fact we had boom boxes, bicycle helmets, skateboards, a whole variety of things—it was just a wonderful event—the kids really got enthusiastically involved in these activities and it just created a culture of excitement throughout the school

The Roadblocks

One roadblock common in the journey for all principals was staff resistance. Some principals had to deal with the resistance right in their own buildings, others had to deal with resistance from other staff within the same district. It was a definite roadblock for the principals going into already existing schools with an already existing culture—the resistance came from within. They dealt with this in a variety of ways including retraining professional development, replacing or moving staff.

> **Marylea**
> *...we had someone who wasn't getting on board despite what we tried...you can't keep somebody that's holding you back...we brought people in...we also had people placed*
>
> *... the old staff needed retraining so one of the first things...was offer those staff opportunities to take time and go and do some professional development....so I think probably 90% of those old staff did extensive PD in the first couple of years...and were able to challenge and go into different routes...that they were happy to go on elsewhere...that helped a bit*
>
> *...post-secondaries, other schools in the district, downtown were still thinking of us with the old reputation...we involved everyone, parents, students in a new communication plan...put that into effect and it took about two years.*
>
> **James**
> *...and of course the resistance from the teachers in the first year.*
>
> *Well, certainly central services, there were lots of blocks there, but I always have been a person to never take no for an answer and would always find a way around it.*
>
> *I had all the old guard with the blinders on which is the usual thing and saying, "How come everything is fine until you got here?"*
>
> *...it was a bit of a hostile environment but in spite of that we got going.*

Michael
We...there were two individuals, one who absolutely refused to take any responsibility for change and was not, in my view, pro-student. They did not accept the challenge of being in a student-centered school. And I don't say this with great pride, but then you must look at performance review because we are there for children and if staff are not acting in the best interests of children and only selfishly concerned about themselves, sooner or later it becomes clear that they're not acting in a professional way—acting very coarse or harsh or neglectful of student safety which you can't accept and that individual, in the end, was terminated with our district and, as I said, I don't share that with a great deal of pride other than it was something that needed to be done for students and I think what staff then began to see was that we had a serious challenge in front of ourselves and that it would be...it would be supported with great support from myself as the principal of the school but we were not simply going to allow resisters to contaminate our progress.

Matthew
...some of the roadblocks would be that bottom level staff that you just have to evaluate. And I have no tolerance for that...I will work with people and set up plans, provide support, but if they don't follow through with the plans I have no problem in evaluating them and getting rid of them.

For the principal who was establishing the new school, the first roadblock was the belief of the students and they dealt with that by making sure they fulfilled their promises to the students.

Pamela
The first roadblock was, I think, the one that kids thought that...they were being denied something

We made promises that we delivered on...always delivered on them. So that could have been a roadblock had we not realized that that was what they were thinking.

She also identified that keeping momentum going was a problem in a new program that would take several years to build. Also, new programs meant hiring new teachers. This was a challenge, however, when they appealed to their own staff for help, one person stepped forward and was able to assist.

> **Pamela**
> *Another roadblock, I think, was making sure that you could keep the momentum of the spirit of the new program alive and well for the people who were working the plan....what helped us...one of the biggest benefits for us in keeping the energy up was that because of the population in the first three years, it was always much larger in September....and therefore we hired lots of new staff in September...we were bringing in young new teachers who were gung ho to get a job....It was a plum learning experience for new teachers and those new teachers every September really kept the spirit high.*
>
> *The challenge was...we really needed staff to work with new teachers. And lucky us, we had a staff member who had been an advisor at university and was just wonderful with teacher training. She took as one of her assignments...working with the new teachers.*

Another roadblock was the public's perception of the reputation of the school. Several schools had an existing negative reputation that needed to be overcome.

> **James**
> ...[the school] *had a reputation too it didn't actually deserve. But that's what happens and of course, word of mouth can make you or break you.*
>
> **Marylea**
> *...everything was hitting us from all over. I mean, we had negative...negative...*
>
> *wherever you looked...there was negative—"you'll never do it, it'll never work, it'll never do this, and what do you think you're trying to do? My kid will never come to your school"...all that hit us for the first three years...constantly. It didn't matter what you did, even the construction hit problems...the end of the first year was probably the worst*

The messaging about the schools had to become positive and consistent and the key messengers were the staff and students—past and present. Principals could not always control this roadblock.

> **Marylea**
> *once we were showing that we were doing it the next thing was "will it last?" And so the next thing was, okay, we need to continue...we have to*

> *keep it going...we have to keep doing...we can not sit back on our laurels for one minute.*
>
> *One of the big roadblocks we had was the stabbing...in the second year. And that was a huge one...because it put us back...to the former reputation. So we had to then devise a communication plan to overcome this and get the right message out.*
>
> *The kids had a very strong leadership group—student leadership, we gave that to them...the goal for them was to keep the culture...to try and keep it there. We still had the effect of the homerooms....through those homerooms we were able to get the culture out to the school to those new grade tens every year...and we used that vehicle for the...getting the culture to continue*

Another roadblock was the self-image, self-esteem of the population of students and staff. The task for principals and staff was to change this perception so that students started believing more in themselves as learners. One strategy to do this was to meet the needs of the students with the appropriate resources and strategies to ensure success and to celebrate whatever successes, often and with great visibility. When students began to experience success, they and their parents became the best ambassadors and messengers.

> **Marylea**
> *Eventually though...the students in the second year began to realize that this is good...their school is something to be proud of...and you saw, in probably the second graduating class, they were proud to be graduating from the new school...in the new colors...not the old colors...first year, no...second year...it was very good.*
>
> **Michael**
> *Because discipline was so salient a concern I identified that right first and foremost...and I remember after the first six weeks of school, meeting with the staff and saying we must make a major shift in support to the students in the area of discipline because every single day for the first six weeks students were getting beaten up at recess time, before school, after school...everybody's supervision was doubled...I wasn't a popular guy!*
>
> *Well, the strategies that teachers were using in their classrooms were mostly excluding students from class. Somewhere along the way the*

> *teachers had picked up that under the Alberta School Act, teachers can suspend children from their class for one period or a period of time. Well, we were having students…teachers suspending students to the tune of over three hundred a month…and so we had to look at dealing with discipline in a different way and some were better at it than others.*
>
> *…discipline was a major problem in the school and we had to learn to do things differently in our classrooms—rather than just sending students to the office.*
>
> *…the staff just said well, it could never happen. And I said, well, it will never happen unless we make it happen.*

There were some differences in the roadblocks that principals encountered, and those differences seemed to be more a result of other dynamics. For example, one school had to establish a different working relationship with another association that worked closely with the students in their school.

> **Justine**
> *I would think that the* [other organization] *was a major roadblock because they saw themselves as the provider of all for the* [students] *and didn't realize the value that you really played in helping the* [students] *to value their own education. So, they really felt that the most important thing for these* [students] *was therapy in terms of somebody to talk to about their problems and my approach was, they needed education and after three o'clock they could have all the therapy they wanted, but education was going to change their lives, that if they didn't have a skill set to, you know, share with their child and to offer an employer that they would never change their lives.*
>
> *I was tenacious enough and I think, certainly with the help of* [two districts] *we were able to split the responsibilities, define the roles and responsibilities of* [other organization] *and define the responsibilities of the educators. And I think with the change in management and leadership with* [other organization], *we were able to come to a mutual understanding of what would happen. I think also personnel changed significantly within* [other organization] *and that made a difference.*

The school elementary/junior high school identified a roadblock between the two levels of students. Getting the older students to take on ownership and responsibility in the school meant that the staff had to gain the trust of the students as well as provide success-oriented activities so that the overall esteem of these students would go up. Once students felt they belonged and were successful, they were more willing to take on the responsibilities.

> **Matthew**
> *The other roadblocks would be we had both a junior high and an elementary. One of the roadblocks was to get, the inner city kids are often quite independent—they're great out on the street, but they don't look after each other as well as they might. Getting the junior high kids to start taking a role in leadership with the other kids...we really had to work hard with our junior high staff to get them to be role models because the younger kids would follow and the junior high kids are a lot tougher to get on side so we had to really work with getting a very strong staff but also getting them involved in...you see they weren't even involved in sports' teams...we got connected with three or four other inner city schools and set up positive, not competitive, but more participatory sports which helped them become better and more confident in sports.*
>
> *...doing unique events for the junior high kids...going out and coaching their ball teams...setting up intramurals, etc.*

One school had outside agencies lobbying against it for fear their own businesses would be negatively impacted by the new focus of the school.

> **James**
> *...but you know you found your ways to do things and of course my colleagues were absolutely convinced that I was going to steal away every band and theatre kid and so on from them. And every private dance school in the city were writing the minister and raising heck because they were convinced that we were going to destroy their programs.*

One principal had difficulty making connections with parents and community members because the parents did not come to the school without some kind of incentive.

> **Matthew**
> *I think the way to overcome a roadblock with a parent who is really difficult in the inner city is to bring them in and engage them in conversations, but also accept some of their ideas.*

> *Getting connections was really tough...getting people to parent council meetings at first and doing things now, like having bingos and family dances, barbeques...getting the parents to come in and watch some of the sporting events...that was a big roadblock for me trying to get people into the school.*
>
> *We had a house, three houses down from the school, Hell's Angels had a house and they used to do quite a bit of drug dealing and used to interact a lot with the kids. And what I did was one of the parents was a member of that gang, and we talked and we went and talked with them and I told them what I was trying to do at the school in terms of helping the kids...you know by just connecting with them, I spent probably six months just saying hi to them once in awhile, getting to know them, engaging them in conversation. After about six months I was invited to come over for a visit. So I went over for a visit and talked to them about doing some things that might help the kids like using better language at school...they came in and got several kids involved in some positive things...told them to stay off drugs...stay in school...we did find some people who were part of the club who were not involved in the drugs and had some strong values who began to reach some of our tougher junior high kids....they used to come in and have coffee once in awhile and let us know what was happening...they also promised to help keep drugs away from the school.*

The principals had to be creative about how they found financial resources to do what needed to be done in their schools. Some schools had seed money provided, some didn't; however, no school had enough resources.

> **James**
> *There was no support whatsoever.*
>
> *...we have no money....so we created our own seed money.*
>
> [for the specialty courses] *there was no curriculum....you just steam ahead and beg forgiveness rather than seeking permission.*
>
> *...and the staff would say, "James, James, just slow down!" Well, hell you can't slow down and you know you've got those cautious types in the school.*

Leadership Strengths and Factors Contributing to Success

The number one leadership strength or factor that principals believed contributed to their success was the passion they had for their schools. They had a vision they believed in whole-heartedly and worked with all their heart and soul to ensure that the vision would happen. They were, as one principal described, "on fire" with the vision of what they wanted to create. They could not be distracted or taken off course with inconsequential things. They had one direction and they pursued that direction with commitment and conviction. Because they believed so much in what they were doing, they made others believe. And, by building that team of believers they enlisted help to accomplish what one person could not do alone.

> **Pamela**
> *I started being asked about it...and then you started dreaming about it...and scheming about it...and thinking what it could look like...and imagining...and all of a sudden I was on fire.*
>
> *And you cannot be taken off course...and you keep thinking of more and more ways to make it work for more and more people. And you just are...you become a prophet or something. You become so inspired by it. You become enthusiastic beyond belief.*
>
> *You have to believe deeply. There is no pretense about it. And if you're a superficial person, don't get into this kind of work. It's way too hard. I mean, you have to go home at night dog tired just absolutely believing that you did the best work you could ever do that day...and by God, you're going back and do it again tomorrow...and you might call five of your team when you get home and just celebrate what little wins you had that day...and worry about three or four kids who might have dropped off the face of the earth. I mean every kid matters...every staff member matters...you have to believe that you're just making a big difference.*
>
> **Justine**
> *Like a conductor...you know you want so many violins, so many cellos, you don't want everybody playing the same instrument at the same time...I think that is one of the attributes that I believe that I have is to be able to*

develop, look at teachers in terms of the skill set they present and the challenges that my students have and try to put the two of them together. And so I think that made a difference in terms of building that school.

Matthew
One of the ways to do that is to give away power. You see empowerment in allowing people to take over things and allowing them to truly do that, make decisions, spend money, set up your entire staff so they accept more responsibility.

James
And not having all the answers. Sometimes we don't want to let people know that we don't have the answer and we'll stall or we'll make decisions that aren't very wise ones but you know it's the same with the kids, sometimes, you know, I don't know the answer and we'll find out together what the answer is. So I've always liked, you know, I'm a people person.

You have to know your curriculum and keep current with the practices and things that are happening but you also have to have that other side of you too. I mean it was different in the days when there was a rigid boundary system and it didn't matter. You lived across the street from the boundary and the school was on one side so you still had to go to the one two miles away because of the boundaries.

Michael
I have the unbridled view that we can become better. You either believe that you can become better or not. And then the courage that it takes to work towards that and not to upset yourself or the people that you work with by not always having the right answer but rather that this is our problem. Let's seek out either a solution or a plan or a direction and if we work at it, and I would share with the staff regularly, it's the synergy of us all working together! Let's first of all define the areas of challenge because it is a challenge. You can define it as a problem but it becomes your challenge now.

And because I believe strongly that everyone wants to belong to something. It became very clear to me after awhile that we were belonging to a team and nobody had to feel that they were doing this by themselves. In fact, one of...just going back to discipline I said, "I do not ever want anyone to say, I was going down the hall and I saw one of Mrs. Jones' students spitting on the wall or being abusive." When we see a student in the hallway they are 'our student'. They are part of our larger school family and every one of us has the same level of responsibility to engage with that student. They don't belong to one teacher—they belong to all of us.

> *You need a coach, you need a—an incurable optimist as a coach and that you look at change over time.*

These principals described themselves as visionary, creative, people-oriented, purposeful, flexible, demanding, reflective and determined. They enjoyed the challenge of doing something that others described as 'undoable'. For many, their passion and the challenge of doing what others said could not be done, created the drive to get the job done.

> **Pamela**
> *I think that I'm a visionary. I think that I have a sense of visioning, but I really am very aware of the fact that you can't do the work alone. It's too big...it's too demanding...and I'm one little person. So what you do though...I also know...that one of my...I'm reflective and I can see my flaws. I'm aware of some of my flaws. But I am also willing to work with people who have strengths...I mean I look for people who are a good foil for me.*
>
> *And you have really to be able to communicate that somewhat articulately because what you don't provide, people fill in the spaces.*
>
> **James**
> *Well, I guess I've always been a—People tell me I've always been a politician. I've never thought of myself that way—being a politician....I've always been a people person and I like to involve people in the decision-making. For instance when I...they finally moved down to the elementary program at the school and, I mean, I told the teachers right from the bat—right off the bat, you know, I'm not an elementary person. So you have to teach me. You know, you'll have to work with me so we'll have the best darn elementary program going. Well the teachers really appreciated me saying that.*
>
> **Michael**
> *I, as an administrator, have very high expectations of all staff members, they have high expectations of me as well. And we can rely on one another for support and assistance.*

Another important factor was the ability these principals had to build the right team for the kind of work they were doing. They were able to identify the strengths needed to do the work and selected people based on that assessment. They also had the ability to recognize leadership abilities in others and to mentor and encourage those leadership qualities to grow and develop.

> **Pamela**
> *Well, I think that probably my belief that nothing is impossible ...and that you don't work alone in this kind of creative work. I think I have a strength in being able to gather good people together to work on projects. I think that I have a fairly good track record and people know that it's worth the investment...that it seems to work. But that also as strong as I can be about "we're going to do this...we're going to do it well"...there's room for lots of input and lots of people to shape where it's going. So, I'm flexible...but I'm demanding.*
>
> *...the people that are working with you have to know what you're thinking and where it's going....you'd meet a couple times a week to talk about where you were and what's next....You kept building that team of instructors and staff and then those people you kept bringing them together so they were part of the creation...what it was going to look like, what will the furniture be, let's think about this together. I think it's that really building ...inclusive culture is really important.*
>
> *I knew we couldn't have all leaders because nobody would follow. So then you start looking for really good seconds who are people who really like to be second in command....so it's really good to have people who are concrete and I'll tell you...I'd had such a great detail person, a second person...who was so detailed and so good...that I think that one of my strengths as a leader is being able to see what people can contribute even before they know.*
>
> *You have to be modeling what you expect.*

> **Marylea**
> *We would look...we would find...and this was one of the keys of ...we would look and we'd see a leadership potential in somebody. So we'd give them...we'd say, "Okay, let's give you a certain responsibility...let's grow that potential...let's stretch you". So we basically took the leadership group...we'd stretch them...and we'd bring them into the leadership.*

> *Nearly all that group are now principals or assistant principals within the district now.*
>
> *...and if you want to sustain change...and it needs to keep growing...you can't keep somebody that's holding you back. And within a group like that, where I wanted everybody to be able to share and be part of that leadership group...I removed...we brought people in...we also had people placed.*
>
> **Matthew**
> *...if you're going to ask someone to take over something you have to sometimes sit back and let them make the mistakes that are there, bite your tongue and encourage them with what they've done.*
>
> *...you need to talk to them to give them your visions and through discussions and actions they begin to bring some of their own unique ideas and they excel*
>
> **James**
> *In the kind of decentralized decision-making organization we have I think we have to be—we have to have that entrepreneurial side. And educational leadership obviously is really important.*

These principals demonstrated, in my view, strength of character and genuineness as educators. Their visions for their schools were always directed toward doing what they felt was right for children. They were convinced that their work would enhance the learning environments for students. They were also convinced that everyone had to be part of the building process and part of what was needed to have things continue in a progressive way.

> **Pamela**
> [Q- You hold high standards?] *There's no doubt about it. I remember, when I first started working on this project with our superintendent...I said: "I need to know what it's going to be like to work with you" and he said, "Look, I'm a bit chaotic and I'm really demanding" and I said, "Hey, it's just like home!". And I also remember an admin assistant I had...she said to me, in about the first month, that she's a little unhappy with what was going on...and she said to me, "Is it always going to be this chaotic?"...and I said, "God, I hope so". Because that's the energy of*

it...driving...and every time we thought we had it solved we would throw something else into it.

It's kind of like an accordion...you're playing music but there's lots of in between ins and outs and squeakiness and you know the music's there but you really have to get as many ideas into it as you can. But it cannot be a free for all. You have to keep centering on what it is, where are we going, what does this look like, what do we have to have.

Marylea
that after four years of seeing it grow...and a little flower growing and coming out of this rocky old seed...it had suddenly begun to flower. But it had only just...it was a very delicate breaking out of the ground...if you could think of it like that. It was just beginning to break open when I took over. And all it needed was a little bit of hail and we would have been dead in the water again...and my job, I think, in the four years that I was there as principal, was to keep a sustained change...and to make sure that the culture we had built...the environment we'd built...would stay

...and the biggest battle that year was to change that particular person...to change his culture which was totally, totally different. It took a year...that's all it took. And at the beginning of the second year, I remember...and I remember the team looking at him and saying, "You've arrived." And he was proud, but it took a year...and then he would be the one that would go out and promote.

...but we grew a lot as a team because these people brought in different things...and yes they became...and the battle that we had...we worked together as a team to change...to bring them into our culture.

Justine
I really think that when we work with children that there's no pecking order, we equalize teachers, we make sure they have all the resources and the support, we treat everybody with the dignity and respect that we believe that they deserve. We hold them accountable for what we want by measuring and monitoring what they do and providing good feedback.

Matthew
...if they're just out of sync with the attitudes and culture they might survive in somebody's else school, but they're not going to do well in your own and you help them move to other locations.

I'm not afraid to deal with those people who are not prepared to perform and work hard for kids and parents and there have been some teachers in those areas who are not prepared to do that. In fact, we talked one lady into retirement...she was not prepared to do things...she was badgering *kids, she was browbeating parents and you need to set standards and you need to set a process of evaluation.*

Michael
It was something that we all had to engage in and feel that we were ... we could manage and overcome any of the problems that we faced.

...and that [the challenge] *would be supported with great support from myself*

What I did not want to happen is for somebody to come and throw up their arms that this is just totally out of control. We had opportunities to discuss discipline and...and we would make time to discuss issues and concerns

I went into each class and talked about what it means to be a member of a team and that we were a school team.

Well, I think, rather than my success, our staff success was a result of us defining ourselves as the solution to the direction that we needed to go, but there was an understanding of great support.

Each principal talked about the importance of taking care of people and being mindful of what they were doing so they wouldn't burn people out. As each one indicated, this kind of work is hard and takes total commitment. They acknowledged and rewarded people for their hard work. They also dealt with resistance and those who were not providing quality programming for children. None of them liked this work, but recognized it needed to be done if it was negatively impacting students and learning.

Justine
And then I think as leaders we have to care about our staff and it's the small things. It's telling a teacher who's just lost their parent—go home, stay home and don't come back until you feel well enough...Absenteeism is very low in this school in terms of health reasons because we tell teachers we care, we value them.

You know it's coming to a teacher's class when they get a new piece of equipment and sitting down and letting them tell you for twenty minutes how it works. Very, very small things like that. Seeing a book that you *think they'd really enjoy...finding it in the bargain's bin at Cole's Notes...Woodworking 101...and you bring it into a woodworking teacher...well he's excited for days on end...small things like calling for teachers and saying "Do you want to go out for lunch?"...But it's also standing up and telling them in a staff meeting that you care, that you're going to be monitoring what you do and that you're there to support kids.*

James

I sent kids notes all the time for the things they did, individual notes and so on.

And if was never a 'me' thing and I had people talk to me about that. They said, "James, you always say 'we'." Sometimes it is easy to fall in the trap of...we all have enough ego in us to want to take credit for things.

I always take things on too fiercely. It cost me a marriage. In reality because I, but I've always been that way....I was always, my sister tells me when we played at things, I was always organizing things, I was always, but guess who had to be the boss too?

Michael

I used to say to the staff constantly, "At any point in time if you feel your time has come, please come and see me." Because I believed that this was a school of high needs that required high energy for us to be supportive to students...I didn't want staff burning themselves out and I said to them openly, "I don't believe our school is a school that most of us will retire from...at some point you will come to the realization that it is time to leave...and when that time comes, put your chin up and with pride come forward." And one of my strongest...one of the great teachers at the school one day came to me and said that she had given serious thought to leaving and I remember jokingly saying, "Well, you didn't really take me seriously, I don't want you or anyone else to leave!" But I said, "You have done yeoman's work, you are one of the strongest most outstanding teachers that I've ever had the opportunity to work with." And she said that she had been up to midnight the previous night giving it consideration and decided that she couldn't leave...She said, "What I'm afraid of is that I will go to another school that doesn't have all of what we have here. We've got very much a family of professional support"....and she said that the culture of this school is by far the best that she had worked in and as a result she had decided to continue to stay.

What They Learned and What They Would Do Differently

The one thing that some principals said they might do differently had to do with how they used their time. Several said they would have involved more people earlier or would have delegated more as they were doing their work.

> **Pamela**
> *I've learned that you can share more of the tasks earlier. You don't have to hold on to it because you don't want to bore anyone else with it...that people like to work with you...and they like to work through all the hard stuff too. It's not just yours.*
>
> *I've learned a lot about...that there's a big community...ready, willing and able to help you.*
>
> **Michael**
> *If I was to do it again, I would be a little more disciplined with my time because I don't think I had to be there as much as I was, but I wanted to be there. You get so, so involved in a positive way with the school. The school in a way it becomes your garden. And that's probably a good metaphor to use. You want to be there to weed out whatever problem there is. You want to weed, water and hoe...weed, water and hoe the whole time. Do you need to be in your garden like that intensely everyday? Well, probably not...beyond the regular operational hours, but it was something that began to feed itself in a supportive cycle.*
>
> *I would have planned, I probably would have spent perhaps less time myself and maybe encouraged staff a little more. But although I was constantly telling staff, "Look you've got to look after your family and home needs" and they would always say, "And yes, what about you?" And so it was that sort of thing...But I also recognize now how fondly they remember the time and so it actually, you know, it has paid off...rewarding benefits to them.*

They also agreed that, when you give something to someone else to do, you must let them do it even if they make mistakes. They believed that you didn't let people make mistakes that would cost them personally or professionally; but they did agree you must let them explore, discover and experience on their own. Then the role of the principal in this process becomes one of facilitator and critical friend. The principals would listen and allow people to share their reflections as equal members of the school's leadership team. For each principal, this notion of collaborative leadership or inclusive leadership was critical to the success of the school and to the continuation of the vision after the 'founding' principal left.

> **Marylea**
> *I don't think we became an effective team until I took over. Because originally, in the first four years it was a team...but I don't think people felt that they had the....There still was somebody that would veto an idea. They still didn't feel quite able to risk being innovative...or risk saying "I don't agree with that". That's probably more likely. I think they felt...yes, they could share...the culture was there to be able to say, "Let's try this...let's try that...let's try something else". And that came from the team of ten...and that was no problem. But if they ever disagreed with anything...they couldn't say so. They felt not quite ready to do that.*
>
> *the other part of the culture was, at that time, was in that leadership team...there would be a constantly downing of a whole pile of things to do. And then never allowing those people to go and make mistakes. It was always a case of you were checked. Did you do this? Did you do this? Did you do this?*
>
> *So, if I learned two things, one of them was...and it was very tough...to sit in some of those first leadership meetings... and say, "Okay, guys, go...and disagree...risk...let us all agree to agree in the end"...some of those leadership meetings, when I took over, would go on two or three hours and get very heated and get some people upset. But we'd always end up at the end with everybody supported and helped everybody else. If somebody had to go because they were so upset...somebody would be out there quickly...get them sorted out...and bring them back...at least they felt they could risk and I don't think in four years I've ever had to make a top down decision. Which was one of the things that was good.*

Two principals said they would have more involvement from the students—to have the student voices heard more often.

> **Matthew**
> *I think one of the things I might do differently is involving the kids more in the actual change aspect of schools. One of the things that I learned is*

> *that the kids actually know, I mean we sometimes don't give kids credit....and if you can get the culture warmer and closer to what the kids believe in and as long as it's safe, under control, disciplined, etc.*
>
> *You learn a lot more when you ask the kids and I think we don't take enough time to do that.*

> **Pamela**
> *What else would I change? I think that I'd just want to make sure that more...we got better at getting student voices....I would want more kids involved...more voices of kids, more often...in what we were doing and where we were going.*

One principal said she wouldn't share as much information with staff because she had learned that staff didn't need to know everything. She could have saved some time had she done it differently. She also indicated she would not spend as much time soul searching as she discovered her 'inner soul' to be a good guide.

> **Justine**
> *Well, sometimes I think I share too much information with staff. In terms of my own thinking and planning because I'm a very open person. And sometimes that worked against me because I was laying out the whole game for them rather than giving them it in incremental steps what the game plan would be. I think I've learned that I need to hold sometimes my cards closer to my chest because I just give everything out I'm thinking and I think everybody appreciates that. I appreciate seeing the whole game plan.*
>
> *And I really learned that...teachers only need to know what pertains to them. They don't need to know what I'm thinking or how I'm planning to work or how I'm planning to interact with the next group.*
> *And I would do some of my work differently. The other thing I would do is not doubt my inner soul. Sometimes I've searched my mind too long in terms of making a decision, not wanting to step on people's toes. I think sometimes you need to just go forward and beg forgiveness. I think that's what I should do.*

One principal said she would have celebrated more and more often.

> **Pamela**
> *I would celebrate more often...more widely...with staff, with kids...with the business community. Because they all owned the success...and I don't think we did that often enough...and that would have probably helped the momentum.*

One principal discovered, through his journey, that you don't always need the money. Things can get done without it and there are money sources other than the district—for example grants from various organizations.

> **James**
> *Nothing. I would have done it exactly the same way. And you don't have—what taught me, taught a lot of people, is you don't have to have all kinds of money to do it. You just have to have the will to do it....I found money...I went after grants and so....some of us principals have always gone after grants...this is not a new thing—there's always been fund raising.*

Leadership Qualities That Are Needed

Many leadership qualities that enabled these principals to be successful were also qualities that are required for any principal to be successful. Principals needed good communication skills and needed to be visionary. They needed to be able to articulate the vision as it was unfolding. They also needed to encourage or find people that could help with the realization of the vision.

> **Marylea**
> *I do the memo... "The Ramblings" now....a communiqué that shared...and in that we do congratulations. We always do bouquets at the beginning of every staff meeting.*

> **Pamela**
> *You really have to build the success story. You have to have words for it, you have to have visuals, and you have to have so darn much belief. Your belief system has to be absolutely 120% and you can't have people working in the creation of anything like this who aren't 120% on board....You have to be true believers that this is the right thing for kids...and it will work.*

> *I originally thought that it wouldn't be fair to ask staff to have to do all those meetings...that that's something that you should have to take off their plate. And then once, when I just had two Rotary Clubs at the same time, I realized that I really needed help and I went to talk to the staff at large and said "We're having lots of interest, (this was in the first six months), who would like to come out?" The staff was delighted to get involved in that, and I suddenly realized that the team was as big as I needed...any event that came up.*

> **Justine**
> *Well, I think to develop vision you need to be very good at strategic planning. And I think that's one of the things that we don't always appreciate in terms of a skill set. I think the ability to analyze data is critical. Not only statistical data but soft data as well. I think those are two of the attributes that I really think good leaders need to have. We all talk about the confidence and the commitment and the passion. We know these things are evident in every strong leader, but you have to have the conviction to go forward and walk a path that nobody has walked before. But know that you have done your homework in terms of your literature review, you know the review of the data, you've got the background information in terms of the perception of all your stakeholders. You have to have that behind you before you go forward and I think that's what good leaders do. Not that they have to agree with all the things that are happening, but they need to understand where all these players are going to come from. And how they're going to respond. And have a strategic plan in your own mind as to how you're going to respond back to those.*

> **Matthew**
> *...they have to be visionaries and they have to be able to communicate. I think two of the key things is you have to be a visionary and look at change and be willing to be able to embrace change, you have to be able to communicate. Communication becomes a motivational factor. Good communicators can get people motivated enough to handle things.*

They also said that principals need to be humanistic, to believe in people and to be able to read people. They need to have integrity and respect those working with them. They also have to have a tough constitution because some of what needs doing will bring criticism and complaint. There will be naysayers and critics who take their shots as the principal proceeds with the vision. This is often the case when the vision requires people to move out of their comfort zones.

Marylea

They have to be humanistic. They have to go with...believing in...not necessarily believing in themselves...but believing in...I think you have to believe in people. You have to be able to read people. You can be taught...as far as I'm concerned...you can be taught all the theory in the world...but if you can't lead people...and know how people think...and respect people. I think one of the things people have said about me and I know it's the case of a lot of us...particularly women...that you're able to put people first...and if you don't do that...whether that's kids or staff...you're never going to be able to lead anybody.

Leadership is built right from day one...and, to be honest, you can look at kids in a playground...at age six...and you can see who are the leaders and who the shakers are going to be...because somehow they are able to...they make friends very easily...they're able to share what they think very easily...they're able to be truthful...and honest.

Integrity is number one. Secondly you've got to have helluva big shoulders and take as many knocks...but try not to take them personally...and you've got to be able to believe in the way you're going...but believe...but be open to people to tell you... "You want to make a move...I'll listen". It's all right to go into a school and say, "I'm here...I'm listening...I'm doing." And you don't. And if you don't listen...like some of the things....You come to a new school and you don't know anybody....I didn't do much else in the first three months...but to get to know those people...how many kids they've got...whatever. To me that was the most important thing I could do.
Many times people have said, "You think of us...you put us there...we're important," and they are. We are in the people business. We're a service business....without the staff we can't go anywhere.

Justine

...the innate quality that good leaders have is not only the conviction that they have but it's the sense of dignity and integrity that goes behind the conviction.

Michael

Well, if you trust in the people you work with and they are able to generate a sense of your trust and your appreciation it then builds the strength of membership to something that's larger than yourself. Because we had so many activities that highlighted the positive, that highlighted our successes there was constantly a showering of everyone's success. The synergy of success if you will. Everyone...success and recognition was everywhere.

> *...First of all I guess, the unbridled view that we can become better. You either believe that you can be better or not. And then the courage it takes to work towards that and not to upset yourself or the people you work with by not always having the right answer but rather that this is our problem. Let's seek a solution or a plan or a direction and if we work at it and I would share with the staff regularly—it's the synergy of us all working together.*

Along with delegating work, principals need to be able to roll up their sleeves and become a member of the team by modeling hard work and commitment. One principal indicated that along with confidence, commitment, conviction and passion, strong leaders need to be really good at strategic planning. A vision will not come to be unless there is a plan as to how it will happen. She believed that all leadership should be moral leadership and that the vision should spring from what people valued and believed.

> **Justine**
> *Well, I think to develop vision you need to be very good at strategic planning. And I think that's one of the things that we don't always appreciate in terms of a skill set. I think the ability to analyze data is critical. Not only statistical data but soft data as well. I think those are two of the attributes that I really think good leaders need to have. We all talk about the confidence and the commitment and the passion. We know these things are evident in every strong leader, but you have to have the conviction to go forward and walk a path that nobody has walked before. But know that you have done your homework in terms of your literature review, you know the review of the data, you've got the background information in terms of the perception of all your stakeholders. You have to have that behind you before you go forward and I think that's what good leaders do. Not that they have to agree with all the things that are happening, but they need to understand where all these players are going to come from. And how they're going to respond. And have a strategic plan in your own mind as to how you're going to respond back to those.*
>
> *Moral leadership is everything. I think when you stand up and you speak to people with conviction you have to have that integrity in the background and that's not something that you learn in a book. It has to be the patterns that you've lived your entire life. That brings integrity to one leader. I place a lot of value on that. I think the passion for your work needs to be evident. That people need to know 24/7 that you're a*

> *principal. I'm a principal and I'm proud of it. That's my work. It means just as much as the President of the United States' work.*

Others said that strong leaders need to be change agents and be able to manage change. In the process of change they need to be able to examine resources, talents and needs and deploy those resources to meet the needs of the populations in their schools.

> **Justine**
> *I think that what a good principal does is look at the resources, redeploy the resources, look at the talent and the expertise and make sure that's drawn out of everybody that you have in your school. And you set the compass for this school.*
>
> *Good leaders particularly in education are change agents. They're not people who want the status quo.*
>
> **Matthew**
> *I believe that strong principals have to be able to manage, they do not have to micromanage, they can have other people on staff to be part of it. I believe they have to empower people.*
>
> *They have to have obviously a certain amount of managerial skill. I'm not as good at the left-brain kinds of things as I might be so when I manage, I look at bringing staff on who can help me.*
>
> *...there are some people who can't think of ideas but can build on them. I'm the kind of person that can take ideas and do that. And on staffs there's two or three different types of people...some can analyze, some are creative...they work together*

Collaboration was seen as important in quality leaders and the ability to get people to work together was seen as a necessary skill. Being able to empower people without micromanaging was seen as necessary as well. Principals need to be coaches and facilitators rather than authoritarian directors. The principals agreed that having everyone express their opinions, even when there was disagreement, was important. A quality leader would be able to listen to everyone's view without prejudice.

> **Matthew**
> *I believe that collaboration is important, I believe that what we often call collaboration is not true collaboration.*
>
> *...when people collaborate on a project, people can come from different viewpoints, but those viewpoints must meet at some level of consensus.*
>
> *...people coming up with all the ideas and being part of it and, in fact, a dissenting view is really important on staff and principals, that might be a principal skill, being able...you know one of the hardest things is when somebody has a view which is not consistent with you as an administration if you internalize it you basically handcuff yourself because then people can't grow if your own sense and feelings are getting in the way of progress itself because somebody doesn't see it your way.*
>
> *Good administration, good leadership skills involve being able to be accepting of those, and in fact, encouraging those people because it's quite often the person who isn't verbose and who isn't the braggart but who comes up with those cute, neat little ideas and then all of a sudden you find out that they have, they go miles to help.*
>
> *...don't simply tell me what's wrong with the organization, give me some potential solutions and be creative and be a risk taker.*
>
> *And with me, when I run meetings, one of the ways to control those kinds of things instead of just whining and complaining is to set standards when you have meetings. And I don't just accept complaining, etc. But a view that's backed up with some research, data and information and with solutions, needs to be looked at.*
>
> *I had a lady who was not happy with our Division I awards. She felt they were too competitive. It was interesting when we began to ask her for some feedback in terms of could she come back or could other staff members help her come back with some information to support that. She wasn't able to do so and pretty soon she came back and said, "I think we're doing a pretty good job."*
>
> *...you've got to come back with some of the solutions. I believe that's another thing I've learned about culture of schools is that you need to have those kinds of things instead of the complaining and bitching and those kinds of things.*

> *...there is always an innovative, creative group of staff members who will look for change...you have to encourage that, support it...you need to bring it along as part of the culture.*

> **Michael**
> *You need a coach, an incurable optimist as a coach.*
>
> *I saw myself as more of a coach. That we were a team and that it doesn't matter how strong a principal-leader you are, if you don't have a team, a sense of team in the school you will make very little progress and that I has as much expectation of myself as I did any other staff member. I wished everyone to engage in the concept of team.*
>
> *And I saw my role as a—more as a coach and I remember saying to staff, "You are the Wayne Gretskys who will score the points with the students. I am a coach and I have an opportunity to look at the whole picture and to continue to give you and I reflections on where we need to go." And I said the worst that would happen is something isn't working, but let's not get upset. In fact, we know there will be many, many times when we will identify that certain things aren't working and so what we do is we continue to fix it until it does. And that became our direction.*

Principals need to be a bit entrepreneurial, need to be risk takers and a bit fearless and have the ability to walk in uncharted waters. Everything should be done to support the needs of students and the focus should be on progress, not maintenance. It would take courage on the part of a principal to take on the task of changing things for the better because not everyone would come on board immediately. Mostly you had to trust in your beliefs and in the people who work with you.

> **James**
> *Well, you have to be prepared to work hard.*
>
> *You have to have that competitive, entrepreneurial spirit and don't want to lose.*
>
> *I'm a sore loser, you know, I don't like to lose and I've always been very competitive that way and right from the very beginning all those people who said, "It'll never go, you're doomed" and what not, well that was enough for me—this was going to be the best anywhere!*

> *People seemed to appreciate that I was hands-on with everything.*
>
> *...people really felt ownership of the thing. I would be there, even though I still guided them, quietly from behind.*
>
> *I gathered all the people together and suddenly I thought we had reached a point and said this is what I would like to do. What do you think? Usually when you said what I'd like to do that meant that's what we're going to do, but I gave it to them to do and so they created it and they felt like they owned it and that's what you have to do with teachers.*
>
> *I know some teachers who came from some other place...and said they had never felt like they had control of things the way they did at* [school] *and that was to a point obviously. You're still responsible for everything that happens in the school.*
>
> *You have to know your curriculum and keep current with the practices and things that are happening but you also have to have that other side too.*

Involvement of Parents, Staff, Students

The principals felt that parents, students and staff needed to be involved from the very beginning in setting the vision and in providing input as to how that vision would be implemented. Some principals did this through focus groups; others did it through their School Councils or through foundations. It was agreed that involvement of these stakeholder groups was critical to the success of the school.

> **Pamela**
> *I was out talking to lots of kids in lots of high schools and lots of staff.*
>
> *I was out in the schools talking to focus groups of kids.*
>
> *...we also had the business world and the post secondary world in our midst.*
>
> *We had lots of mentorship going on so these students had not just teachers to talk to on a pretty regular basis but they had employers and educators from post secondary.*

We talked to all levels in the district...about what they thought. It needed to be lots of parents...a lot of contact with the business leaders...and they were very happy to talk with me.

So all those focus groups I had of district, downtown and people out in schools and some business leaders and parents to get ideas coming in.

Marylea
I had always been, from day one, the person that went and worked on bringing in the students. So my job was to provide...communicate to the community...communicate to the parents...the staff of the junior highs. I then had to work on the staff of the post secondaries and just the general community around that this was the culture of our school.

We'd have the school council meetings....very informative meetings

We had a lot of volunteers...We would always have information sessions...to come...and to talk to staff

And the parents felt they had a say...and the biggest thing...is trying to build that. Now I've started a principal's advisory group. Students have lunch with the principal...Now we've got a box in the office...put your comments in the office...and the pieces of paper are in there now. But...it helped kids come in and say... "can we do this" ... "can we do that".

Matthew
One of the things I feel I'm really strong at is that you know, not only to develop the feeling of the children being part of it but in your parent council meetings, we have barbeques that open right at the very first three weeks of the school where we actually feed the parents. They come with their kids.

They need to learn that they can trust the school and act upon things as well because...and then when you're getting into misbehaviors, involving parents and saying, "Here's what the plan is... ", so you send out a commitment to success at the beginning of the year and the parents read it, the child reads it, the teacher reads it...and we sign it.

I have a real belief that parents need to feel that they can walk into our school...parents could walk in during the morning recesses and afternoon recesses and...come into the staff room and have coffee with us and talk about things. During noon hour was the one time we didn't allow it...staff needed sometime during the day to eat their lunch—to have their own time.

Parents loved the fact that they could come in...If you lead by attitude and you talk appropriately, you don't talk about kids during those times...when you have them in, parents feel like it's their school too.

...and then you get parents involved in volunteering programs and events you have in the school

...we worked closely with the community beat policeman

...at the beginning I brought in a group of parents who had left and asked them what was great about the school when they were there and what they thought we should improve.

...and then I brought in a group from the community who didn't have kids in the school and asked them about the school.

James
...we set up a parent, this was before School Councils, we had the parent council set up right away. I wanted to, you know, a lot of schools had band parents groups or whatever. Well, I set up an arts society instead so that everybody had their, instead of competing against one another, they worked as one unit and then there'd be the subgroups or ad hoc committees or whatever for band or whatever and again they felt, they felt ownership of the thing.

Quietly, you kept it going. Our arts foundation was set up for kids to be able to pursue their arts passion after high school if they didn't have the money.

Some of the parent involvement things that we did—I mean, we built that sculpture garden between the, I'd always wanted to fix that area up. Well the parents took that, I mean, and created this amazing, said it cost nearly a half a million dollars, I mean that [artist]*sculpture that's out here if I had commissioned that it would have been over a hundred thousand dollars and they managed to convince* [artist] *to donate that. So parents, say with the foundation, I mean, you give it to them to do, I mean, it's not where they wanted to be yet but the fact that I'd thought I'd have a real struggle with it, but they have done it.*

Michael
...we looked at the needs of our school. Anytime we could highlight an area for improvement, we did—and then we built that into an acceptance of support from staff. Shared it with students, shared it with parents—so we began to include the community. One of the police officers who worked regularly in the community who was well known to some of the families due to various police interventions became a friend to the school

> *and he would come into our assemblies. We would introduce him...and he would just receive a huge applause of support. We included different people in our assemblies.*
>
> *We worked with a variety of agencies that provided support for the families and the students and we got parents involved in helping to support their children with homework and reading. We had parents volunteering in the school as well. A lot of parents attended our monthly assemblies as well.*

Can Anybody Do It?

Three principals thought that others could not do what they had done and three principals thought that anybody could do it provided they had the right skills, attitude and knowledge. The skills needed were the leadership skills described previously and the attitude was one of willingness to work until the work got done. The amount of work that one has to do to implement the vision seemed to be never-ending. Many people would not want to make that kind of time commitment. It really was about having a passion for the work, having a dream and giving yourself to that dream. That was the essence, I believe, of what these principals thought was necessary for anyone to be able to do this work.

> **Pamela**
> *No, I don't think so.*
>
> *Well, you have to be a pretty broad thinker and you'll have to have been other places...you have to have been in all kinds of different schools...and you'll have to have been done some hiring...you have to have experience...your first school of hard knocks cannot be setting up a school like this...I mean, I was eleven years in a high school in this district where I got to do every job imaginable.*
>
> **Marylea**
> *No. I think you have to...you have to believe in...you have to have a passion...for what you're doing. You have to believe in what you're doing. Sometimes what you believe in...can be absolutely messed up. But you have to say, "I know...I did that was going to work." And we did that*

so many times...so many times....We'd go off...we'd have this idea...and...it didn't quite work. But you've got to be able to say to yourself, "That didn't work, let's try again."

Justine
No, and good leaders spot leaders. Whether you like them or not you can find them under a rock. They crawl out...it can be one sentence that they say. It's the way they live their lives and I think good leaders can help other leaders develop a skill set that will make them leaders.

Strong leaders leave a pattern behind them and you can always tell a strong leader when things stay in place when they go or things fall apart when they go. You know if you don't have the leadership you cannot sustain the change.

Matthew
I believe with the right set of abilities or skills and the right belief systems, I believe that anybody can do that. Will everybody do that? No, there are certain people who may have things within their character that stop them from doing that. If you can change and accept change you can do that. .

The other question is "Do I believe that anybody can do the job as well as me?" I might be vain enough to say that I think I do better than some others, but I have a real belief in culture that if people believe in communities and believe in the right things and keep working on developing skills that a point you can move from this point in your life to here because I believe that if you have a great attitude you can learn.

I believe that as long as you're open willing and open to change that we can have a lot of people do that.

James
Well, you have to be prepared to work too hard. I, when I say worked too hard, I did it because I wanted to, not everybody wants to do that. You know, because it's a huge commitment. You know, and again you have to have that competitive, entrepreneurial spirit and don't want to lose.

Michael
My role as principal was to get my team united and focused in the right direction. The component, the ingredient that I think that you have to have is a passion. A passion for wanting to work with children and with staff. And if you have, and of course, we know that there are many people that do and this is why, yes, in answer to the question directly, can others do this, absolutely. You need the passion and you also need a sense of risk to have a little fun with what you're doing. That it's not something that has to be taken so seriously but rather to just let yourself loose a bit, allow

> *the passion and the dreams that come with the passions, the possibilities, the dreams of possibility and then to just allow that energy to flow mixed with the passion that not only you provide but other staff provide and it'll just take off on its own.*

What Inspires and Motivates Principals

The principals were inspired by the success of their students and their staff. They would spend time in different parts of the school interacting with students and teachers. Observing the energy and the dynamics of the daily interactions, watching the vision unfold day by day and seeing the enthusiasm of the people around them inspired most of the principals. One principal was inspired by being around other strong leaders, listening to them and watching them. All the principals liked the challenge of the work. They enjoyed the creating and the building; the sifting and sorting through ideas and the trying of various things. They enjoyed the camaraderie of the teams they had in their schools. But mostly they were inspired because they felt the work they were doing was making a difference in the lives of the children.

> **Pamela**
> *Oh...I love to see educators feeling that they are making a difference to every kid they meet in the day...and that they have all of the tools they need to do that...and all of the support they need to do that...and they love it...they love every kid that comes in...and they're making sure that kids get what they need. It's not a canned lesson...it's what they need...they know exactly...I just believe that passion is the only way to teach. And I believe that you have to work with people who are as passionate as you are about what you do.*
>
> **Marylea**
> *I've enjoyed what I'm doing. I enjoy what I'm doing. I've been off...I've left education for a while. I've been out in other fields. I came back because I wanted to. I believe that we should do the best for kids...and if*

in some way we can help them...do them...and make them feel better in themselves...My biggest regret right now...and I'm similar to you...this place is too big...I can't get to know the kids....if I'm going to make a difference in a kid's life...I want to be able to see that.

...the best hours that I think we ever spent...was in that first...after probably the first year...was the time we spent just talking and sharing the days...the vision of where we were going...and where we went. And then slowly encompassing that into growing that...talk to the other people...so his vision would be shared to me...I would give my feedback...then we'd slowly bring all that out so everybody was all part and parcel of it. That's what I tried to do.

Justine
Other good leaders. I love to read about good leaders. I like to watch good leaders. I like to listen to good leaders. I think that's a real passion. I'm now developing a real understanding of the sport of football because I'm looking at coaching as leadership. Which is never something that I've ever been attuned to before in my life.

But I try to surround myself with other people who have conviction, other people who are very well read. Other people who can promote change.

Matthew
The things that inspire me are the successes of both staff and kids. Kids may motivate me more. The hugs, the parents that smile and tell you that you've done a great job, uh, a few of my peers who give me positives.

I get a lot of motivation from the community, the things that are happening in the school, the successes of the kids.

What else motivates me is when top caliber people like other educators that I know and highly respect as leaders give me feedback about the things that I'm doing. That really motivates me.

The other aspect is having, like I get a good paycheque, and that motivates me. I like getting paid well.

The most important thing that motivates me is when I see the successes that I, myself, have had a tremendous amount of input or I've mentored somebody that's come out...I've had six different assistants in the last seven or eight years who are now either principals or assistant principals. And what's really neat about that is it tells you that's a real high motivator for me because it says if you're giving away a piece of yourself and you're showing your leadership and it's being taken and it's being *utilized and the world's a better place—that's probably one of the key motivations for me.*

[name of the school] *was almost like a religious journey because you gain such inner satisfaction in terms of seeing the changes, seeing the growth, seeing the talent of the kids, seeing fewer kids involved with the law, I believe that all of those things, you know are part of why we are administrators. But more than that. It also strengthens and really consolidates your beliefs about education and that all kids can learn and those kinds of things. I had tremendous satisfaction from it and it really motivates you and invigorates you to continue doing it.*

James
Certainly the kids, the interaction with the kids—that was my big thing.

I would take kids down into the catacombs...another thing that I would do to personalize the school...and the high school kids were all complaining that I never took them down in the catacombs.

...I would take, I've got this one particular story where I read and about half-way through, a little more than half way through, this part where the cold, cold, gnarled hand closed around the wrist and stop right there and say okay that's enough for today. They'd all groan and moan and were all mad so then I'd say "Well we can finish the story if you invite me back and, of course they would.

Michael
I'm inspired by, I think, by what everyone's inspired by and that is progress. As an animal on the planet if we look at our history, we have made change...the change has been progressive...and I think that we all want to be progressive. It's not that we start with wanting to be successful, we want to be progressive...we want to learn. And there is so much to learn and so much progress to be made and the wonderful thing about it is that everyone can! We've all been in a kindergarten class and the wonder and excitement when they learn something! Well, let me tell you that that same excitement began to happen for staff and when staff would come into the staff room at lunch and say, "You won't believe what happened in my classroom!" And they would radiate with excitement about an activity that they did in their classroom and how much growth their students had made since the beginning of the year.

Personal View on Education and How It Translates Into Culture

Each principal believed all students could learn. They believed their professional responsibility was to create an environment where students could achieve success. They also agreed that students needed to be responsible and active in their own learning and that good teaching was critical to the success of the students. Along with assisting students with their academic learning, school was also the place where students could learn about themselves and where they could have self-enhancing experiences that would help them realize their true potential. All six principals believed in schools centered on the needs of the students. Part of their job was to ensure the resources required to meet these needs were available.

Public education was seen as the way in which students were provided equal opportunity for success not only in school, but in life. Education was seen as the key for changing the lives of students. All six principals included their beliefs about education in their vision for their schools and infused these beliefs into the daily fabric of their work. What was important to them was that everyone was focused on the needs of students and that achievement and student success was the main purpose of the organization.

> **Pamela**
> *All kids can learn...that you've got to be really committed to that.*
>
> *We are all in this together. The kid has to carry his own weight but we're there to make sure he has the tools to get there.*
>
> *...really building a whole community working together.*
>
> *...really connecting for those kids to the bigger world.*

I believe that you have to do things differently so that all kids get the chance to perform at the level of excellence.

...you have to believe that you're just making a big difference.

Marylea
My personal view is to be able to do whatever the best is for our kids...in some way. To teach them...to help them...blossom into what they are supposed to be. I have a particular...yes, I want to see the kids do really well...I also really want to...I quite like this idea of the career pathways...and things.

...but my belief is we've got to do the best and not just get their achievement in math. I mean, yes, we give them the best at the end...so that they've got all doors opened. But...university is still not the end degree for 90% of these kids.

Justine
Well, I think my view is the only common element that we can give everybody in this world is education. It's a common line in every country in the world you go. And it's the one thing that should be available to make a significant difference. And that's the great equalizer in our world is education...and so if you want to equalize, not marginalize life for children, you provide them with the tools to do that...Public education is where it's at.

...we don't need a two-tier system, you know, you would see if you look back historically that most great leaders came out of public education. You think of Colin Powell now whose life is all over the television and I mean he went to public school, wasn't an A student but he learned, he got the equal...he was equalized there and was given some tools which he learned to use later in life to bring leadership about. And so that's what I tried to do in this school. I really think that when we work with children that there's no pecking order, we equalize teachers, we make sure they have all the resources and the support, we treat everybody with the dignity and respect that we believe that they deserve. We hold them accountable for what we want by measuring and monitoring what they do and providing good feedback...and that's what I think makes a difference for children.

Matthew
I believe that everybody has tremendous potential to become active participants in learning and that, I mean it's almost cliché to say I believe in lifelong learning. But I also believe that we have to work really hard because I believe that there can become a certain point in our lives where

we believe that everybody can and must be a participant in their learning for the culture to be highly positive in a school.

And I don't know if we put enough challenge into education...and I really believe in education that we need to push, challenge and develop ourselves, our staffs and our kids even more than we are today...I believe that we are developing more of a mediocre society and I think we have to be really careful...to keep those standards right up there...we're not challenging our kids to always be the very best.

And it's in the telephone calls. You begin to see some of it in the telephone calls from downtown where when we expect homework...a few years ago it was just a given that kids were expected to do homework. I had a lady this morning who phoned me—we had set up with our grade six students on a homework plan for their upcoming ski trip. We had discussed it, parents were informed, had agreed. This one young student wasn't complying so I contacted her parents to let them know, and even though they had initially agreed, now that their daughter wasn't fulfilling her responsibilities the parent phones and says, "You fucking asshole." So some people are letting their children not meet their responsibilities. And you get into that kind of situation and then it goes downtown and then the response from downtown is "Well, can't you give her another chance?"....and I say that brings mediocrity because then people have no reason to excel.

James

Well, of course, I'm a big supporter of public education and I'm really concerned about all this push towards private schools and full funding for private schools and so on because it's just going to take money away from public education and we have to keep it strong and so that's one of the things I've been working at.

...it's been my passion, my love. I played teacher when I was a kid. You know when I went to university and I was married and in a house and a mortgage and a kid and all the rest of it, I was going to go into law, but then I ran into a former principal...and he told me about the bursaries and so on...they were offering very generous bursaries and there was a teacher shortage at the time....I started my life as a teacher of business courses.

I've always believed in kids, you know, that kids can learn and that you shouldn't write kids off. The time when kids say to you that they finished school because of you, those are the kinds are things that make it worthwhile. You have to have the strategies in place to ensure that kids are going to learn and that's why the alternative programs work because not everybody marches to the same drummer, so to speak.

You have to help kids make the right choices. I always had high expectations in terms of be there everyday, be on time, that sort of thing. It's the same expectations that will carry on into the work force. I mean if you don't show up on time after awhile you may not have a job.

I always focused on success for kids and at [school] *we wanted to make sure that everything was done through a focus...because for some kids it was what made them continue with school, the opportunity to do something that they really liked. Sure they had to do all the other stuff like the math and social studies, etc. but doing well in something like dance or band or theatre always helped.*

Never a regret. It's been a wonderful life.

Michael

I guess my personal view on education is that it's all about, obviously, learning. The question is learning what? In its very narrow form we often see education as the learning of the subject areas such as English, Math, Social, Science and a wide variety of optional and that is of course very important. We need to teach children from kindergarten through 12 how to read, how to write, how to work with numbers, but as important, or perhaps more important, is the socialization of the child. We do not want simply to have educated students who are dysfunctional in terms of their contribution to a social network. We don't want to wind up having educated, rude-thinking dysfunctional crooks and criminals. It's so important that people understand that there is an interpersonal relationship between themselves and everyone that surrounds them. And I can't think of a better, if you will, institution where that socialization can happen with the structures and support, than a place called school. So my personal view is that education is about educating a child on a wide-variety of interpersonal, social, relationship concepts, components, skills that weave themselves through a curriculum that is very simply defined as the subjects that are normally taught in a school. Those all form the culture...all of that combined form the culture. That if staff at an individual school believe that it is their mission, their responsibility, that it is their involvement with students that can assist and help to create a healthy educated mind then the culture of the school is as enriched as it possibly can be. If some teachers feel, for every teacher that feels that their primary role is to simply teach the academics of a curriculum, English, Math, whatever, then you have a much lower level of affective culture that will make a meaningful contribution in the future to the child.

By identifying first of all with the teachers and the staff, what is it that we are truly here to do...all students have a need for competency and achievement, all students have a need for structure, safety, harmony and *discipline. All students have a need for positive, personalized interaction with peers and adults and the adults that I refer to are not just the adults that are called teachers. Any adult that comes into contact with a student in a place called school has a responsibility to assisting and supporting the need of the child. There are primary levels and secondary and tertiary levels. Obviously you're hoping that the parents are those significant adults. Whether it be the secretary or custodians...those are significant adults...volunteers...anyone who is involved with the school and in the neighborhood have a role in the education of the child. And, I mean, I hate to use the cliché phrase, but the African proverb that it takes a whole village to educate a child. We're all involved in that education process and therefore must build a strong culture. A culture of village, a culture of family, a culture of team. All see itself woven into the cultural fabric of the school.*

One Single Factor That Most Influences School Culture

Every principal thought that the leadership of the principal was important in building school culture and that the building of a working team and community was critical to the success of the vision. Having the vision, getting people enthused and motivated and working as a community, were seen as the key tasks of the principal in making the school successful. The passion or enthusiasm, the commitment and the energy of the principal also seemed to be key factors in the progress or success of the work.

Pamela
What you do to enable the community to work together...

Well, I guess the one factor I think took that was, in the end, that which...the glue that held it together...was that I believed if you wanted people to think...and grow...and be inspired together...they have to be together.

So it was my belief that they had to be together. They had to be in this room together and they had to have enough commonality when they were in that room to care about each other. So you had to look for people who wanted to buy into this vision.

...there has to be...the fire has to be burning somewhere...and I guess we have to keep the fire burning...we have to keep stoking it...and you have to believe in.

I think as a leader you have to have an incredible drive and passion. But it's got to be tied to a vision and a purpose for kids and educators. And you really have to care about empowering teachers...because you can't do it alone. I think one person may start this whole thing...but if you think you can do it alone you're not going to get very far...people won't work with you that hard.

Marylea
One of the things I've learned...more than anything else...is that you're not alone...but you have to have that passion...the energy...and I think of the past principal...that was one thing he had...he had vision...he had energy...he had passion...and he loved people. So you put those together...he believed in kids...believed in kids one hundred percent...more so, probably than the staff...but one hundred percent believed in kids. And if you can do that...and I listened to [ ] many times...because she is an awesome leader...she believes in kids...kids come first...That's what we're here for. We're here to work with kids.

But my biggest resource, I believe, in the school as a principal is your teachers too. And I think a lot of us forget that. I'll go out of my way to help the staff...to make them feel that they are respected...and listened to. If you went and asked staff now...after three years...they'll say, "Well, [Marylea] *really, really believes in us and thinks about us...and puts us first"...but, not puts us first...but is really trying to look after us. And you have to do that....letting them have a say...and letting them believe in it...and putting them first.*

Justine
Oh, I think it's the people. The relationships that they develop. You know this is a very rich relationship here. As I mentioned everybody in this school is the focus.

I think the principal is critical because the principal sets the tone and almost gives people license to be who they are once you've identified the right people....I think that what a good principal does is look at the resources, redeploy the resources, look at the talent and the expertise and make sure that's drawn out of everybody that you have in that school. And you set the compass for the school.

Matthew
The attitude of the principal in the school and the leadership provided by that principal. I believe the belief systems of the principal or the vision of

> *the principal to provide, as I said before, safety, discipline, control and positive interaction between peers and adults. To me, the principal is still the key person who can either provide the impetus for empowerment, etc. so if there was one factor, it's the leadership of the school.*
>
> *They either excite and motivate and everything else or else, I've seen so many schools, I've seen so many real good principals...who go into schools and they have like the enrolments have gone like from 400 to 700 or something like that and in three or four years a new leader who doesn't excite and bring the banner out, those enrolments drop off and people vote with their feet.*
>
> **James**
> *The role of the principal is critical. The principal and I mean, you know, we've heard that line for a long time, "So goes the school, so goes the principal." You know, they can make or break a school.*
>
> **Michael**
> *I think you need an optimistic, energetic school principal...who sees themselves, he or she, as an instrument of support, a catalyst for change. It shouldn't have to be that way, but over the many years I've seen that when staffs or a school begins to become defeated, somehow there's not a lot of energy left to rise above the occasion and an administrator can be that person.*

What Makes Them Feel Good or Bad

Every principal indicated that the 'happiness', enjoyment, and achievement of the students and staff made them feel good and gave them a sense of pride in what they were doing. When they saw the progress in their schools, the energy that was created and the overall 'feeling' or 'culture' of people working together to give students a positive learning experience, they felt good.

> **Pamela**
> *You asked what makes you feel good at the end of the day. I think when you can see a kid believe in themself and have success and just come and tell you about it. I can't tell you the number of kids who came and said "You know, I never thought I could finish Math 30", "I didn't think I'd finish my high school diploma, and you gave me a chance"....So that*

makes my work worthwhile..I mean it is always for me what you get from a kid.

I think, in high schools today it's always a stress to make sure that kids are working in a safe and successful environment. That always keeps you on your toes. I just don't think that you ever stop being vigilant about that. So at the end of the day when everything has gone well and everyone has gone home ... they started the day well and they went home well ... you feel good about that.

Marylea
I feel good when the kids come in and out of the door...and we talk to students...when you...I love sitting around the table discussing things with staff...with students. I'm having a staff fireside this afternoon...I'm trying to introduce that....that to me will be a highlight. My highlights are also...I go with the teams sometimes. I don't know, I get motivation from all sorts of different things and it's usually when we see kids happy...when we see...even just a one-on-one with a kid sometimes.

Justine
One of the things that I love and I do as much as I can...I love to go our and stand in the atrium and watch the students as they come in school in the morning. And I love to see their faces when they're laughing and they're really happy.

Matthew
The events when somebody comes down for a 'Super Student' award and for doing something wonderful in terms of their academics or citizenship—that makes me feel really good.

Coming to school in the morning and getting the hugs from the kids and talking with the staff and even the relationship with the staff. For instance we've been invited by the [school] *next door and seventeen of the nineteen staff members have chosen to come and that me a lot about how the staff are a team.*

...going into the classrooms and seeing the active participation and the leadership that our kids are showing and the staff...putting in a tremendous day...that gives me a tremendous feeling.

Parents, I get a real kick out of seeing the volunteerism in the school and where you see that and the thankful parents who walk in and say hi and that kind of thing.

James

...and one of the things that I like to do for the kids when we were doing the big performances....on the eve of the opening of a show and they were doing their last dress rehearsal—I would, and we'd have a cast and crew of eighty-five often and up to a hundred, that's why we could run those big productions because we didn't have the overhead and salaries and so on...But I would cook dinner for them—personally. And I'd do a simple dinner, I'd do pasta and Caesar salad and garlic toast and all that. But the kids always thought that was so cool that their principal would cook and serve them dinner and then I'd thank them and give them, you know, a rah, rah talk afterwards.

Michael

To go for a walk through the school and to engage with students...to watch the staff teach. There are examples of growth and success everyday in our schools. And you must go out and seek that. You must surround yourself with success. And also to feel that you are building on something. It's not a spectator sport that I'm going to go out today and say, "Ok, I'm just going to go and watch it happen." Yes, you may need your own boost by watching it, but you must always have areas of involvement with yourself in this process that you're constantly working on and then when they, when those areas that you're working on begin to blossom, you can't help feel wonderful inside that you and your efforts are creating additional success.

What made them all feel bad was when they were not successful with a student or a staff member. Because these principals had such commitment and passion for the work they were doing, they all felt badly when they missed something that they might have been able to prevent. They are in, as one principal said, "the business of hope" and with that hope comes the belief that with just the right program, interaction, plan, or set of circumstances every child will be successful. When that hope was not fulfilled there was a feeling of disappointment and, for many, a sense of guilt that they had missed something.

Pamela

The bad things are when teachers burn out or kids drop out. When kids drop out because they just have so many influences in their lives and school just can't be number one it just breaks your heart ... that they don't get this chance right now. And that there is only so much that you can do *for them. So kids who have way too many crisis in their life ... who can't meet the needs of being a successful student ... that hurts me. And staff who want to do it but sometimes just don't have what it ... something gets in the way and they need to buy out. And it seems to me it isn't ... I always feel good if I can help that teacher have the time out ... whatever that means ... I guess the sad part for me is when you don't see it coming. And I think that we always want to be able to see our staff needs before it's a danger. So, I think that's really important when you're working and ... I mean, I seem to like in sort of "white heat". But you have to be sure that the people who are working with you are being supported enough that there are not going to get burned by it. And that kids have got supports and safety nets too.*

Justine
Well, when I feel we've failed a student. That really bothers me. When I think we haven't done all that we can or all that a teacher could. I think that really bothers me personally....There are some that I can walk away from, but there are others I said, "Boy, you know, we missed the boat on that one."

Matthew
If we've missed a point with a kid where a kid's been punished when we know and we find out that we should have been sharper on it and when we have to apologize—we shouldn't have made the mistake—we should have been better at helping the kid.

Or a kid not being able to achieve something and us not being, not even being able to make time to help that child understand. One of the things that I think makes me feel really bad about time-outs is when I get a student in time-out and...I come in to help him and I see that he can't do the math that he's been given to do. It actually, it not only disappoints me, it infuriates me. I have to say that at those times that I feel really upset because it shows that we've missed it.

James
[what made me feel bad] *Well, when I had to get mad at kids. I had to get nasty. I never expelled very many, maybe I think two or three kids in all the time I was there, but sent kids home, suspensions and so on, and getting mad at myself sometimes for getting mad. Because I have a short fuse sometimes too. People know me as a jolly and affable guy, you know, but I have a short fuse too and so I'd get mad at myself for getting mad. When I get frustrated with some teachers who I made it clear to them when they arrived at the school you know even though contractually I couldn't say those things and what not, I would say, "You're coming to a school where you work a minimum of a hundred and ten percent and often about two hundred percent, you know what I mean by that. This is not a*

> *normal school. So expect to work very, very hard. So when they didn't, I'd get frustrated. Anyway, those are the things.*

One principal felt badly when he saw staff members choose to become unable to deal with ordinary responsibilities such as student discipline because they were fatigued or frustrated and had allowed that fatigue to make them bitter and cynical rather than looking at the issues with a more problem-solving approach. He found this disheartening and frustrating because some issues will always be part of the teaching job and people need to recognize that and look at supportive and creative ways to address the issues instead of just becoming complacent and blaming students, parents or the system.

> **Michael**
> [I] *feel disappointed...when either a student or a staff member gives an indication that their giving up on the progressiveness of their work. And I understand that, you know, at times that we're all fatigued and I think it's most often related to fatigue, it's what I sometimes call the right set of wrong circumstances that happen either in a child's life or a staff member's life where there's just a mounting of things and sometimes for example you don't know before an incident happens the baggage that the student or the staff member brings with them and it's the old proverbial making a mountain out of a molehill situation when something evolves, something that is an obstacle or something that's a conflict that needs to be resolved turns into a minor crisis. I'm disappointed when that happens and I guess I have a very high standard for everyone, students and staff, but certainly higher for staff that we are the paid professionals and must recognize what a child brings to the school each day and in that this school was in a very troubled neighborhood I would expect that the staff would understand the baggage that students brought or could possibly bring to school each day. And sometimes you would see and if wasn't that often but when it did happen where, you know, a staff member was just frustrated and would demonstrate the frustration in a comment like "I just don't know what to do with Billy" and it's that generalized "I don't know what to do with Billy"...and I would sit down with the teacher and we would discuss...giving the teacher the opportunity to vent the incident and then by drawing some clarity to what actually is the problem in most cases we were able to pick it up and to resolve it. I guess that's where if I was disappointed about something it was the lack of character strength on the*

> *teacher's part to fully understand the taxing and challenging behavior that a student might bring.*

One principal indicated that having a professional community of support was important when times got tough. Other principals said the students kept them going.

> **Pamela**
> *One of the things that keeps me going is a time like this...I really like to engage in meaningful conversation...I think professional conversations keep professionals going. And it is such a treat to be able just to have professional learning together. The time that we're taking together today is refreshing and it renews my spirit. And then I can turn around and I can help my staff. I can suddenly think of things to talk about...other questions to bring to them to get them thinking. It's certainly the professional conversations for me that keep renewing me. And that can be with staff...that can be with colleagues.*
>
> *Oh, you find mentors. You have to be able to talk it out with people ... you have to be able to cry it out with people ... you have to have people who you can trust*
>
> *... and just say: "Hey look it ... come in and look with me ... what else can we do?" It's not always easy. But if you think you have to have all of the answers, it's way too hard. And so you find colleagues ... I had a great study group when I was opening up that school and they were really good*
>
> *So, I think that you have to find someone you can work with and support you the way you are supporting your staff. That it's okay to make mistakes. I don't usually repeat the same one twice. I find a whole new different innovative kind of mistake and you learn by it. And I think that you have to work with people that are forgiving ... and you must be forgiving yourself ... because, if you are going to take risks, sometimes you are going to fall on your face.*
>
> **Marylea**
> *What keeps me going? My stupidity I think. Sometimes I think...I've often thought...I'd like to be downtown...I've often thought...I'd miss that...but I would really miss the kids...I'd really miss the interaction with kids...but then sometimes I would like to be...if I know I can make a difference...that's a positive difference...that would motivate me.*

The 'synergy of success' phenomenon is, I believe, what kept most of these principals going. One principal described it as a 'positive addiction'. With each success or move forward, a new energy was created. One could say that events such as being able to convince a resistant staff member to come on board and become recharged and enthused about the direction of the school was, for these principals, like what a hockey player might experience after a win. The difference, however, is that these principals did not feel that the win meant they were the "best', they felt it was more a ratification of their work—that what they were doing was good for students.

Marylea

So, I know I have to feel that I'm going to make a difference...and if I don't then I want to move somewhere else.

Justine
Well, I think we have to find balance in our life. We have to find other things to keep our spirits alive. And maybe I need to sit out in my, as I call it, little flower school and ignore the chaos that's around me.

...and just, you know, believe in my students and my kids.

Matthew
[what keeps me going] *Again the smiles and the reactions of the kids when they're achieving are big factors. The fact that I know that the best change happens when the toughest times occur...And so that really motivates me because you can change more in tougher times...that's why I like going to different schools and working on cultures because you see you're going to get the challenge and it's always tough, and when do you make the best changes? When times are toughest.*

Michael
Often when times are tough...and I mean, myself included you can feel the pressures of the school year, the pace by which we were keeping in regards to the progress that we were making, if sometimes it seemed like things were slowing down or grating on any one particular issue, I guess I got the greatest amount of strength by recognizing the change and the improvement that so many students were experiencing.

> *And sometimes there was just the spontaneity of being rejuvenated. For example there's one particular little boy, who would come to my office for what he called his 'interviews'. He'd come to the office, he was in grade one and he would say, "Yes, will you tell* [name of principal] *that I'm here for my interview" and he would come in and sit down and very interestingly he would, 'cause I often will cross one leg over the other and* [student] *would cross his leg over the other and then he was very diplomatic he'd say, "Ok,* [principal] *what should we talk about today?" And he was, you know, six years old coming on sixty and so I would just bite my tongue raw sometimes what would come out of this little gaffer's mouth. For example, his teacher was about to have her first child and so one day* [student] *was in my office he said, "You know,* [principal], *Mrs.* [teacher], *she hasn't named her baby yet. When her baby comes, she doesn't have a name for it so I told her, I said, well, why don't you give her my name* [says his first and last name], *that's a good name isn't it?" And he was so proud that he would be able to offer this as a quality name for his teacher's child. It was hard sometimes to not just burst out in laughter at the pureness by which he was expressing himself.*

How Much Time Is Needed?

Principals said the progress they made would not have happened without the extra hours they put in beyond a regular working week, day or year. They all put in thousands of extra hours after school, on weekends and during their holidays.

They described it as a 'mission' or as one person described 'holy work'. And like a mission it meant living it twenty-four/seven. They worked evenings, weekends, holidays; without resentment, because they felt energized and enthused by what they were accomplishing. It was 'fun' and when work is fun it doesn't seem like work. My personal experience supports this view.

Reaching above and beyond in our schools, takes a lot of time and commitment. This kind of work, however, can cost people in other areas of their lives. One principal believed the work he did, in part, cost him his marriage. It could be said that these principals were 'married' to their work because of the time, commitment and energy they put into their schools. They, however, strongly believed that the end result would not have been the same without that extra time.

> **Pamela**
> *Well, I'll tell you what ... I probably got two dollars an hour. I think it's sad but it's probably true. If you believe in this kind of "born again" work you have to be a partial workaholic ... or you are ... or we are attracted to it. I've had to work very hard these last few years to find some balance in my life. So I guess you have to learn how to play fast and hard so that you can keep working hard.*
>
> *It would be what it is. If you weren't there before quarter to eight in the morning when the people started coming in and there wasn't that first pot of coffee on ... people didn't have the same kind of day. Then night school started and you didn't want to leave before the night school staff all got in to have theirs. And yet you're not the only one who can do it. But, I think that it could ... if you don't put extraordinary effort in to it ... people won't even put the usual effort in to it.*
>
> *And you have to have some sense of "this is way beyond an ordinary job and it's going to demand super extraordinary effort". But, you know what? That's when you get the win ... that's when you get the huge big feeling of "this is worthwhile" ... because you put in the extra effort and it works.*
>
> *Oh, sure. You go to Rotary at seven in the morning ... and you get to school and have your first meetings. And if you're going to be an instructional leader, you're going to spend a lot of your day in classrooms. And I was doing that before I knew the terms. Because I knew that was where it was happening ... and that's where I had to able to help them in the next PD session ... was to see what strategies were working the best for those particular students. And then at night, you have to sit and plan with somebody who needs to do some diploma prep courses and they need some help on that. So, I believe that you have to really have to want to do work with the staff ... and you have to find your ways to get your own play in there. I don't know how you could do it in ordinary hours ... I couldn't.*
>
> **Marylea**
> *Hours? Lots. I can't even count...but that was something I did...we did...that's part and parcel. I had a leader that would give of all his*

time...and I certainly believed in his leadership...and followed him. He was probably the best mentor I've ever had. But also...learning from him...I'd put the hours in...but I'd do it.

You have to put in the extra time and you have to have the belief that you can do it. And the enthusiasm to do it...otherwise...if you're doing it against your will...then there is something very wrong. I don't begrudge the time otherwise I wouldn't be here.

Justine

At [name of school] *it was two years of seven day a week work. And summer. And an entire summer to put that school together. Yeah, two full years and I'm talking no spring break because that was when I had to meet with the architect...or* [provincial people] *to get the money...so I missed spring break and then I missed the entire summer doing the renovation. But when I look back on that I feel proud about it because it was done correctly.*

[without the effort]*...we would have been a low achieving school where you can come and do a nine to three job....you wouldn't have the commitment, you wouldn't have the students being as engaged as they are.*

Matthew

In summer I was in like literally every day during the summer the first year. I think I had only three or four days off in that first summer. In the second summer I think I had two weeks.

I was there almost the entire summer because the one area about going into and developing cultures you have to be prepared to do the groundwork early because you've got to have some things look different...it sends a message that change is coming.

[it requires the extra time?] *Absolutely. I don't think you can do it without. And I think people have to be prepared, I believe that anytime you make something into a really strong culture it takes time and sometimes it's costly in terms of leadership because at that point you sacrifice some of the balance in your life and you only have so many energies to do that so many times.*

I believe [if the extra time was not there] *the school would have been mediocre.*

James

Far, far too much time. As I said I finally did it to myself. I started to—I didn't allow the staff to come into the school on Sundays. Or myself, I *made the rule because people didn't want to compete with you but felt obligated to be there because you were there.*

I always take things on too fiercely. It cost me a marriage.

You know staff are always scared to death if I had any spare time on my hands or whatever, they didn't want me to have think time because I was always wanting to do one more thing.

You were at school at seven o'clock in the morning or earlier and you were there late at night. But you were there seven days a week a lot of the time because that was just the demand..I never took more than a week or two weeks maximum holidays in all the sixteen years I was there.

One principal gave a vivid description of how the work and the progress can become so self-reinforcing and addictive:

Michael
Well, ok, it was common that I would get to school at seven-thirty and it was very common, I could be there until seven-thirty in the evening. Certainly, you know, eight to twelve hour days were not uncommon at all...and...at [school] *I couldn't really remember a weekend where I wouldn't go in for say at least half a day. And sometimes more, in fact, a lot of times more.*

It's like a positive addiction. As much as I can honestly and sincerely say it absorbed my time to a very significant level, hours upon hours, upon hours of extra work beyond the regular school day, nightly after school, on the weekends, during Christmas, spring break, summer holidays...it really, and I know that this might sound cliché, it really was a labor of love.

So would I do it differently? Intellectually I would say yes as I started with it I would put more of this on other people but there were many people on staff who were burning the midnight oil with me. I mean it was almost like there we were an after school club, a weekend club—coming in and spending all of this extra time.

Let me give you an example. It was almost like a ritual routine. Often I would get to the school, same time Saturday morning as I would on a Monday morning. I'd be there for seven, seven-thirty in the morning and I'd make a pot of coffee and while I was making the pot of coffee, I'm already multi-tasking things that I need to do, prepare for the coming week.

> *So there was just a whole lot of different things and I would always carry one of those yellow sticky pads in my pocket and as I'd be standing there, the only one if the gym, I'm writing down some of these ideas and then I'd get back to my office after having this tour, and sometimes the tour, I could be out in the hallways going through the entire school, take me an hour sometimes and then I'd come back to my office and I'd start making notes to myself and formulating then tasks to do—my to do list for the coming week...often there were times when I would show up not only Saturday, but Sunday and I recognized on numerous occasions that I had to maybe police is not the right term, but I'd have to police my own behavior because when you're having fun it is a positive addiction and sometimes you don't prioritize other parts of your life.*

Summary

The principals in this study believed that school culture was the environment, the personality, the feeling in the school. It was described as that which defines a place, the ethos, the thought, behaviors, attitudes and traditions that develop over time. They believed school culture was critical to the success of the school because it was based on the values, beliefs and purposes of the people in the school. A positive school culture was thought to enhance the overall achievement of the students in the school.

A sense of team was needed to build positive school culture and the development of a common vision or mission of the school was critical to building that sense of unity and team. All stakeholders needed to be involved in establishing and implementing the vision.

Principals needed to identify other leaders in the school. These leaders would be key in the development of the culture of the school because the principals could not do the work alone. The leadership philosophy of the principals was one of empowerment and shared responsibility.

The physical environment of the school needed to support the vision. The schools needed to be clean and everyone needed to take responsibility for keeping it that way. The artifacts and displays were an extension of the vision and supportive of celebrating student success.

Developing relationships of support, respect and trust were critical to positive school culture. Principals needed to be mindful of others and themselves. They had to have good communication skills and be able to communicate clearly, honestly and often so that everyone had access to the information that was needed in the deployment of their responsibilities.

Principals could not micromanage. They needed to let people make mistakes as long as these mistakes did not impact them professionally or personally. Principals recognized they needed the support of everyone to make the work more manageable and productive.

Being a visionary, risk-taker and entrepreneur were seen as desirable traits by the principals. They believed the principal had to be passionate and alive with a 'dream' for their school. Principals had to model what they expected of others in the building. They worked long hours and became 'positively addicted' to the work because of the success that was happening.

The key to the success of the principals in this study was their ability to develop and maintain relationships of support and caring with the people around them. Language that was inclusive, inviting and respectful was used by these principals in developing relationships. In fact, the most useful 'tool' these principals had was the language they used in their discourses and conversations.

Hearing what people had to say, what they believed and what they thought in regard to education and students, was an important part of the success of these principals. School was about more than just the day-to-day interactions. Principals thought it was critical that they 'take care' of relationships by understanding people's experiences and backgrounds. Leadership was a shared responsibility with others on staff, but "stewardship" was the key work and responsibility of the principal.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

The following chapter discusses the research findings in examining the journeys of six principals as they built their school cultures. These findings are then compared to previous research and discussed in relation to the topics school effectiveness, change, school culture and leadership. I analyzed the data looking for what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as "what is real." Their idealistic philosophy assumes "that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals....[that] truth is a matter of the best-informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus at a given time" (Schwandt cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1984, p. 128). I began by examining the data for themes and, as these emerged, looked for consensus. From there I compared common practices that emerged as these principals described their journeys in building school culture. Finally, in an effort to supplement what is known in this area and provide a guide for future reference, I present a framework constructed from these findings.

School Effectiveness

The principals in this study described their schools as having what MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed (1997) indicate as the three core characteristics of effective schools: a focus on teaching and learning, the development of a learning culture where the staff are engaged in their own learning as well as that of students by participating in an appropriate staff development program, and high quality professional leadership and management. The principals also supported the idea that school improvement must go beyond student achievement results and include overall pupil progress and development (Stoll & Fink,1996). These schools fit the indicators for effective schools as described by Stoll & Fink (1996) because, according to the descriptions from the principals, they were schools with the following practices:

- their primary goal was enhancement of student outcomes
- they had set a clear focus on tasks of learning and teaching
- they managed change
- they set and limited their own direction
- they evaluated the current culture
- they developed positive cultural norms
- they established a strategic plan to achieve goals
- they paid attention to internal conditions that enhanced change
- they maintained improvement even when conditions were not favorable
- they monitored and evaluated change processes, student achievement, and progress of the improvement plan

Change

"Change is complex because it is inextricably linked to our emotions….the management of these non-rational responses to change, especially anxiety, is crucial in change management" (James and Connelly, 2000, pp.16, 17). While working through the change process, each principal experienced different reactions from various staff members, students and, in some cases, parents. They described the staff as experiencing "a whole range of emotions: anger at the imposition and the denial of personal autonomy, sorrow at the sense of loss of the old, and anxiety at the uncertainties that the new will bring" (James & Connelly, 2000, p. 16). The principals also found that "Anxiety [and anger were] the dominant emotion[s] in the management of both imposed and self-initiated change" (James & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). They recognized that staff members reacted out of fear of losing their jobs, others reacted out of anxiety because they were being asked to move out of their comfort zones and others were uncertain how to react because they agreed with and supported the changes being discussed, but may have had alliances with other staff members who were reacting more negatively. This also supports research from Conner (1995) who expanded on the reasons why people have difficulty with change:

- Lack of trust.
- Belief that change is unnecessary.
- Belief that change is not feasible.
- Economic threats.
- The relatively high cost.
- Fear of failure.
- Loss of status and power.
- Threats to values and ideals.

- Resentment of interference.

Principals managed the various reactions as they worked through the change process. They used relevant research, asked for input from stakeholders and collected as much data for analysis in an attempt to provide as much information in their rationale for change. This was done because they believed that once people were faced with the research, data and rationale for the need for change, they would accept it easier. This helped convince some people to come on board; however, each principal had to deal with staff members who were continually resisting the change despite the logic and rationale. These individuals were, for the most part, assisted in finding placements that would more suit their personal views and values. Principals felt that debate, disagreement and dialogue were critical to creating successful change because when all was said and done, a direction could then be established. All six principals agreed that asking for feedback and input was a critical strategy in working with the staff, students and parents when implementing any kind of change.

The principals in this study found that implementing and managing change was complex and 'messy' work. They were able to describe what they thought was the critical first step in the change process, that of establishing the vision or the mission. Each principal had to manage the day-to-day dynamics of a school at the same time as they attempted to bring about change. The work they did and the processes they implemented supported the main themes of educational change in the research of Morrison (1998). The principals found that:

- Change is structural and systemic

- Change is a process that occurs over time
- Change is multidimensional
- Change is viewed differently by individuals and requires a range of responses
- Change management requires investment in resources—technological and human and management of the process
- Change strategies must be flexible, adaptive and emerge over time

Managing change was a critical part of the work these principals did in the change process in their schools. Yukl (1994) summarized guidelines for managing change into three categories. The work these principals did in managing change fits the previous research in this area as well.

1. Each school developed a vision for change. The vision was simple, idealistic and painted a picture of the future. It was not set out in steps, but rather was a focus to guide strategy at the same time as providing flexibility for innovation and creativity. It was attainable and emphasized ideological benefits. It was grounded in the current reality and addressed the values important to the institution, the environment and the people working in the institution. The development of the vision included stakeholders, had goals that had wide appeal, included what was relevant from previous beliefs and linked to the core competencies of the institution. It was continually assessed and refined.
2. Implementing the new vision required the identification of people who could facilitate change and those who were opposed to change. They found that time to work with both groups was critical in the implementation stage. Once

people who supported the change were identified, they became the coalition for the implementation of the change. Key positions were identified and staffed with effective "change agents". Task forces or committees were established to assist in the implementation and facilitation of change. Significant, symbolic changes were carried out to demonstrate the efficacy of the change. For the principals, making changes in the physical plant was a symbolic and significant way to provide a visible indicator of change. Most principals implemented change in the area that was identified by staff, students and parents as the number one area for concern. Principals started small and built as the energy for change increased. They began with what was relevant and valued in the organizational structure and teaching/learning process. They monitored the progress of the change process so as obstacles appeared they could be addressed. People in key positions assisted in the coordination of different aspects of the change and the impact or effects of the change were evaluated on an ongoing basis.

3. The principal and people in key positions developed a sense of urgency about the need for change. Time was spent collecting data, research and ideas as they prepared for the change. Benefits were described as the need for change was outlined. Time and assistance was provided for those having difficulty coping emotionally with the change. Tough decisions were made and individuals who were not only resisting, but negatively impacting the process, were challenged. People were provided current information on the status and progress of the change and received whatever professional development was

required for better performance. Commitment to the change process was communicated in all actions. People were asked to help and were empowered to implement changes. Considerable time was spent to ensure people understood the purpose of the change. Principals worked with people's strengths and provided help in areas needing improvement so that the work progressed.

School Culture

Principals believed that "the principal" was a key factor in building school cultures; however, they all agreed they could not have accomplished what they did without the help of others. They believed that having key people in leadership positions and the development of team was critical to the successful implementation of change and school culture. The synergy created when everyone worked towards the vision in an enhancing way made the work achievable. This focus on the importance of key positions and team leads me to believe that these principals viewed culture as residing in the confines of the organization resulting in the inducement for change resting more directly under the influence and control of management and/or administration. (Isaac and Pitt, cited in Golembiewski, 2001). This also supports the research of Akin & Hopelain (1987) and Sherwood (1988) who indicated that one of the most critical factors in the formation of culture or the "workscape" images that employees share in their organization is leadership. The research also indicates that, during culture formation and change, leaders employ both implicit and explicit approaches to creating culture. According to Schein (1983), three significant mechanisms to shape and change behavior are:

- What leaders pay attention to
- How leaders react to critical events
- Role modeling of leaders

The principals in this study paid attention to the vision for the school. The vision was created from what the stakeholders valued and wished to see guide and frame the culture of the school. The principals also paid particular attention to the following elements and how they supported the vision: student achievement and performance (the teaching and learning, knowledge and competence of staff, student achievement results and programming for differences), discipline (staff and student conduct and behavior, character education, school-wide behavior expectations), culture enhancing programs (celebrations, traditions, activities, extra-curricular), human resources (staffing, community resources), and operational management (facilities, finances). These areas needed vigilance, planning and overall supervision and management. At certain times any one of these areas might be under the microscope and defined as an area of need, but all must be attended to in some manner in the course of creating school culture.

The principals agreed with the research that says school cultures are "complex entities that do not develop overnight….they are shaped by the ways principals, teachers, and key people reinforce, nurture, or transform underlying norms, values, beliefs and assumptions….[these] cultural patterns are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, and shape the ways people think, act and feel" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 4).

Each principal agreed that school culture was critical to the success of the teaching and learning that took place in their school. Many studies (Rutter, et al., 1979; Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988; Fullan, 1998), found that school culture was critical to successful teaching and learning. "Improvement efforts were likely in schools where positive professional cultures had norms, values, and beliefs that reinforced a strong educational mission. Culture was a key factor in determining whether improvement was possible" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p. 5). Principals indicated that establishing a sense of team or community as part of the school culture helped make the culture more positive and was critical in pushing for excellence and enhancing teaching and learning.

In a study comparing public and private schools, Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) found that a sense of community was essential to establishing a sense of excellence. Each principal in this study was dedicated to the teaching and learning in their schools, held very high expectations for themselves, their staff and their students and constantly focused on making things better. They were committed to excellence and striving for better performance. That is why they focused on creating a culture that engaged students in learning. McLaughlin (1995) found in a longitudinal study that schools demonstrating higher performance had a positive culture.

Principals believed the vision for the school needed to be reflected in all that was being done. Because the vision was based on values, it could not just be something that people paid lip-service to. It had to be supported through daily actions and interactions, not just through organizational changes such as timetabling or teacher assignments. Newmann and Associates (1996) found that changing the structures within a school was not enough for improvement. The culture had to be changed as well so that the focus was primarily on student learning, that everyone committed to establishing high expectations, that there was support for trying new things, and that there was professional discourse and research into better practices. There was also an "ethos of caring, sharing, and mutual help among staff, and between staff and students, based on respect, trust, and shared power relations among staff" (p. 289).

The principals attempted to create a 'learning community' whereby people had a say in what was happening, but at the same time had to commit to and act in a manner that supported the vision and the values. Fullan (2001) refers to this as the moral purpose. Positive relationships and caring were identified by the six principals as critical to creating a positive school culture. One of the principal's tasks was to ensure that people felt cared about, that people respected each other and the work they were doing and that everyone was working to support the vision.

Deal and Peterson (1999) have summarized the general elements of positive school cultures and suggest that schools with a positive culture have:

- A mission focused on student and teacher learning
- A rich sense of history and purpose
- Core values of collegiality, performance, and improvement that engender quality, achievement, and learning for everyone
- Positive beliefs and assumptions about the potential of students and staff to learn and grow

- A strong professional community that uses knowledge, experience, and research to improve practice
- An informal network that fosters positive communication flow
- Shared leadership that balances continuity and improvement
- Rituals and ceremonies that reinforce core cultural values
- Stories that celebrate successes and recognize heroines and heroes
- A physical environment that symbolizes joy and pride
- A widely shared sense of respect and caring for everyone (p. 116)

The stories and descriptions by each of the six principals suggest their schools would, according to these elements, have positive school cultures.

Leadership

As Darth (1998) indicates "the idea of leadership that seems to be emerging calls for rethinking the source of leadership. It will no longer be thought of as something initiated by the leader (or by the followers) but understood to begin in *the reciprocal connections of people working together*" (p. 414). Principals agreed they could not have done the work alone. The most important work they did was to involve all the stakeholders and build a team of people who would work together in establishing and implementing the vision. This goes beyond the notion that leadership is a personal trait and that anyone can be a leader.

Three principals agreed that anyone could do the work if they practiced a shared leadership model and involved people in the process. This is a move away from what Goleman (2000) describes as coercive leadership where the boss requires compliance from the workers, and fits more with what he refers to as affiliative. Principals insisted that people were first in the work they were doing. They believed two of the most important aspects of their work were building relationships and developing people for the future sustainability, or as Goleman (2000) calls it, "coaching for autonomy."

Principals in this study indicated their understanding of the different styles of leadership by changing styles to suit the issues they were facing. During times when they had a good idea, they were authoritative; at other times, such as when helping a teacher deal with a student issue, they operated from the coaching style. As Goleman concludes "leaders who have mastered four or more—especially the authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching styles—have the best climate and business performance" (p. 87). These principals certainly demonstrated a clear understanding of these different styles and how to use them.

The predominant leadership style for each principal appears to have been affiliative. This compares to what Darth (1998) refers to as "shared meaning making" which "refers to the reciprocal social processes by which a group of people agree to understand some phenomenon and what value to place on it" (p. 415). He suggests that "leadership begins and ends in the interrelations of people working together" (p. 414). Darth's view of leadership goes beyond who leaders are and how they can bring influence to bear, to:

> the processes by which people come to understand and attach meaning to shared work…leadership is understood as being much more important than before because not only does it involve creating shared goals and motivating people to work toward them but it also constitutes the very ground that makes goals (or even lack of goals) meaningful. (p. 432)

From the comments of the principals, it is clear that this was the purpose of their work and their main leadership style in moving the work forward.

As was said earlier and frequently, leadership is critical to the success or failure of building positive school cultures. However, what we do not need, says Fullan, is "superleaders."

> Charismatic leaders inadvertently often do more harm than good because, at best, they provide episodic improvement followed by frustrated or despondent dependency. Superhuman leaders also do us another disservice: they are role models who can never be emulated by large numbers. (p. 3)

"Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 21). I do not believe the principals in this study viewed themselves, or that others viewed them, as 'charismatic' leaders. I believe they were dynamic leaders who challenged people to face issues and/or problems and who approached the complexities of school change in a manner whereby solutions were created collaboratively. These principals saw change as a complex process with no easy answers. They were courageous in challenging themselves and their staff to work together in making things better for students.

Much of the work the six principals did in changing their schools fits Fullan's (2001) model where he describes the five components of leadership that "represent independent but mutual reinforcing forces for positive change" (p. 3) in organizations as well as in schools—moral purpose, understanding of the change process, strong relationships, knowledge building and coherence making among multiple priorities.

Moral purpose is about making a difference in the lives of people. In education, it means to make a difference in the lives of students. Each of the principals believed their mission was to make a difference in the lives of their students. As Fullan (2001) indicates, improving how we live together is a moral purpose of the "highest order." In his description of moral leadership, Sergiovanni (1999) refers to the "lifeworld of leadership" and authentic leaders as having "integrity, reliability, moral excellence, a sense of purpose, firmness of conviction, steadiness, and unique qualities of style and substance" (p. 17). He goes on to say that "authentic leaders anchor their practice in ideas, values, and commitments, exhibit distinctive qualities of style and substance, and can be trusted to be morally diligent in advancing the enterprises they lead" (p. 17).

The intensity and commitment that was easy to hear in the voices and stories of each principal in this study suggests they were authentic leaders. Many of the above descriptors describe these individuals. Their sense of purpose was clear; their firmness of conviction was highly evident; and each had unique qualities of style and substance. The other elements of integrity, reliability and moral excellence are something that may be inferred by many of the comments.

Fullan (2001) indicates that if leadership is to be effective it must "(1) have an explicit "making-a-difference" sense of purpose, (2) use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle tough problems, (3) be held accountable by measured and debatable indicators of success, and (4) be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it…mobilizes everyone's sense of moral purpose" (p. 21).

The principals in this study demonstrated purpose, used a variety of strategies to get people moving, were not afraid to tackle the tough problems, and frequently monitored progress in relation to the purpose of creating a healthy learning environment.

Because change is messy and constant, it is critical that leaders understand it and its process. "Understanding the change process is less about innovation and more about innovativeness. It is less about strategy and more about strategizing" (Fullan, 2001, p. 31). What many have realized is that change is not manageable and that "the best way to 'manage' change is to allow for it to happen" (Mintzberg et al., 1998, p. 324). The principals in this study described the complexities and the unevenness of the change process. Sometimes implementation of changes was relatively easy; other times it was difficult and required re-strategizing.

Each principal appreciated how changes in one area could have ramifications in others; and realized they needed to be flexible to regroup when necessary. They also spoke of the frustrations they experienced as they worked through the change process.

During the time of this study, principals were no longer working in the schools they had described in their interviews; therefore their reflections were of past experiences as opposed to "real-time, lived-experiences". This may have allowed the principals to be more insightful in their analysis of their experiences; or, it may have allowed a more "romantic" viewing of the past. I mention this as a caution in the telling and interpreting of the data.

Many people in successful organizations will attribute the success of the organization to the people in the organization. This was true for the principals in this study. They attributed the success of their schools to the people who worked with them. But, as Fullan (2001) argues, the success of the organization is only partially related to the people. He says it is the relationships amongst the people that make the difference.

In their book *The Soul at Work*, Lewin and Regine (2000) indicate that "most people want to be part of their organization; they want to know the organization's purpose; they want to make a difference. When the individual soul is connected to the organization, people become connected to something deeper—the desire to contribute to a larger purpose, to feel they are part of a greater whole, a web of connection" (p. 27). Leaders must be genuine and develop relationships based on authenticity and caring—you can't fake it. These principals somehow inspired their staff to this level of ownership and involvement. The principals, themselves, were openly passionate and shared how their 'souls' were connected to the work they were doing. Each indicated that the thousands of hours of work were not a hardship because they 'loved what they were doing'. They truly had a mission and were connected in a way that involved their souls.

Kouzes and Posner (1998) argue that "leaders create relationships" (p, xv) and that the following are essential in the development of relationships:

- Setting clear standards
- Expecting the best
- Paying attention

- Personalizing recognition
- Telling the story
- Celebrating together
- Setting the example

It was clear from the many stories in this study, that the principals had high standards for themselves and the staff and students in their buildings. They expected the best of themselves and others and paid attention to the things that were important in fulfilling the purpose or vision. They were generous in their personal recognitions of people who helped, they were respectful and honest in telling their stories and they were genuinely pleased to tell their stories of celebration. It was clear throughout the interviews that the number one model in each school for commitment, dedication and hard work, was the principal.

Goffee and Jones (2000) postulate that we should be led by people who inspire us and that those who inspire us should: selectively show us their weaknesses thereby revealing their humanity and vulnerability, rely on their intuition, manage employees with a kind of "tough love", and allow for differences. By listening to the principals' stories in this study, I could see how their staffs had been inspired. The stories showed the humanity and vulnerabilities of each principal. They also showed how each principal had a finely-tuned sense of intuition, especially when it came to understanding the individuals on their staff.

The principals also indicated that, in order to bring about successful change, they had to bring people on and coach them for leadership and future sustainability of the organization. Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) refer to this as building "school capacity" and includes teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes; the professional community; program continuity and coherence; technical resources and principal leadership. Quality leadership is critical to the building of school capacity because, as Elmore (2000) indicates, "the job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result" (p. 15). Each principal saw this as a key responsibility.

Principals in this study strongly agreed that times of change often seem chaotic and bring a sense of messiness and disorder. They also found that it can be good as it can inspire creativity and "out-of-the-box" thinking (Fullan, 2001). They did find that it meant "living on the edge [where you are] simultaneously letting go and reining in" (p. 107). For most of them, that was the exciting part of the work they were doing. These principals thrived on the excitement of what some would describe as chaos.

Pascale, Millemann and Gioja (2000) suggest that the mind set for leading in a culture of change is to realize that "the world is not chaotic, it is complex" (p. 6) and that working through the complexities of innovations in a collegial environment will, hopefully, bring about some cohesion. Each principal appeared to have this mindset as they thought it was critical to work with their staff as a team. In addition, these individuals seemed to possess the capability to manage and track multiple pieces of information and change simultaneously. They approached issues with a problem-solving mentality looking to resolutions or solutions that had the best fit. They relied on their staff to help with this process and believed that many minds were better than one in the problem-solving paradigm.

One of the main problems in schools is not that there are no innovations, but that there are too many "disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects" (Fullan, 2001, p. 109) and that this situation is worse for schools than businesses because they also have "the additional burden of having a torrent of unwanted, uncoordinated policies and innovations raining down on them from hierarchical bureaucracies" (p. 109). This kind of disturbance is counterproductive and serves only to exhaust people.

Hatch (2000) suggests disturbance as a strategy to bring about change, but the key is to disturb people in a way that will achieve the desired outcome. Part of what these principals had to do was to sift through and protect their staff from disturbances. They needed to disturb in a strategically beneficial way and screen out some of the less productive disturbances. Because "productive disturbance is likely to happen when it is guided by moral purpose" (Fullan, 2001, p. 110), these principals demonstrated insightfulness by establishing a vision that was related to a strong moral purpose. These principals challenged themselves and their staff to constantly examine their work in light of the needs of students. As Fullan (2001) also says:

> the route to making good things happen and preventing more bad things from occurring is a process that generates widespread internal commitment from members of the organization. You can't get there from here without amplifying and working through the discomfort of disturbances....[and that] effective leadership means guiding people through the differences and, indeed, enabling differences to surface" (pp. 113-114).

Creating coherence from what appears to be chaos is part of the job of the leader. In doing this, leaders should "design more than engineer, discover more than dictate, and decipher more than presuppose" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 175). Claxton (1997) adds that in a culture of change, leaders should be more like the tortoise and less like the hare. "Hare brained" is about relentlessly chasing innovation; "tortoise mind" is about working through disturbances to create new patterns. One principal learned that she had to change how much information she gave her staff. She realized that part of her role was to provide what was needed and what could be assimilated. She found that too much information was confusing and distracting for some of her staff. Each principal demonstrated the ability to manage, decipher, and assist staff in discovering information and solutions. They found this created a stronger commitment on the part of the members of the team. It is clear as we reflect on Fullan's (2001) three lessons for leading in times of change that these principals experienced the same lessons in their journeys of change. They saw:

> the vital and paradoxical need for slow knowing, the importance of learning in context, and the need for leaders at all levels of the organization, in order to achieve widespread internal commitment.... [They all said that] listen[ing] attentively [was a key skill]....[because] ineffective leaders make up their minds prematurely. (p. 124)

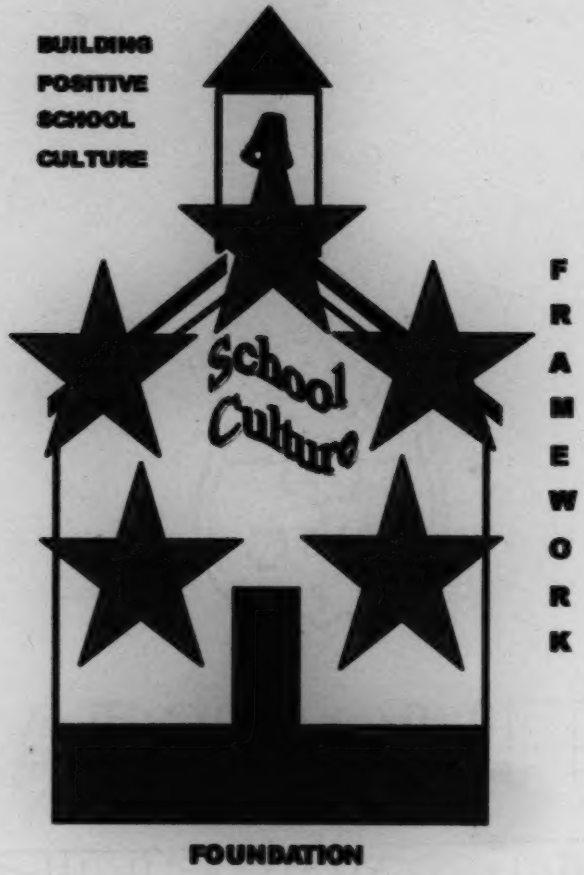
Leading staff through a process of change was a learning lesson for the principals in this study. They agreed that it was an excellent experience that resulted in new understandings and created a genuine sense of accomplishment.

Conclusion 1: Framework for Building School Culture

As indicated earlier, what principals pay attention to is important in building school culture. Principals must, by the very nature of the job, pay attention to a number of things in their role as principal. In an attempt to understand the processes in the journey the principals in this study undertook in building school culture; I have constructed from their stories, ideas and comments, a framework for building school culture. After listening to the journeys of the principals, and based on my own experience as an administrator for the past twenty-one years, I propose that principals pay attention to five areas in building school culture—student achievement and performance; student discipline; programs, traditions and celebrations; human resources and operational management. I have labeled the proposed framework "The Five-Star School" (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

THE FIVE-STAR SCHOOL


BUILDING
POSITIVE
SCHOOL
CULTURE
School Culture
FRAMEWORK
FOUNDATION

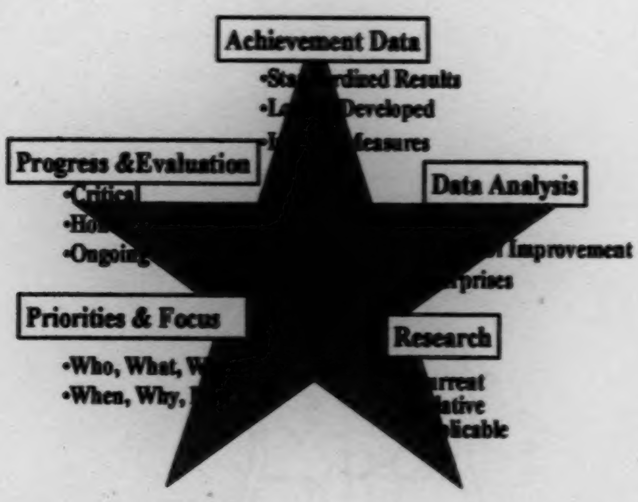
The five areas identified in this little red schoolhouse are areas the principals alluded to as important components of every school. The foundation of the five-star school is made up elements described by the six principals. As indicated earlier, effective schools are places where the focus is on students and learning, where there is a strong sense of team and an atmosphere of belonging, where trust and caring are important, where people are involved in decision-making, where leadership is shared, and where people have a sense of equality and empowerment. All of this helps people become committed to the vision that is the basic foundation of any school culture.

Each of the five areas identified by the principals are examined below:

1. Student Achievement (Figure 5.2)

Student achievement and performance are a significant part of what we do in schools and are often a main part of the vision statement. Principals and their staff have access to standardized results, interim measures that may or may not be locally developed and teacher observations and assessments of learning. This information, along with any information from research in the area of student learning, is a valuable place to begin conversations with teachers, students and parents. In analyzing all data, the principal and their staff can look for strengths and areas in need of improvement. It is also useful to look at any surprising information as it may provide further insight into the performance and achievement of the students. The conversations are an attempt to get a reliable picture of the current performance and achievement. It is very important in this process to hear from staff, students and parents with regard to what they believe about student achievement and performance. Once the areas in need of improvement are identified, priorities can be established along with a monitoring and evaluation plan.

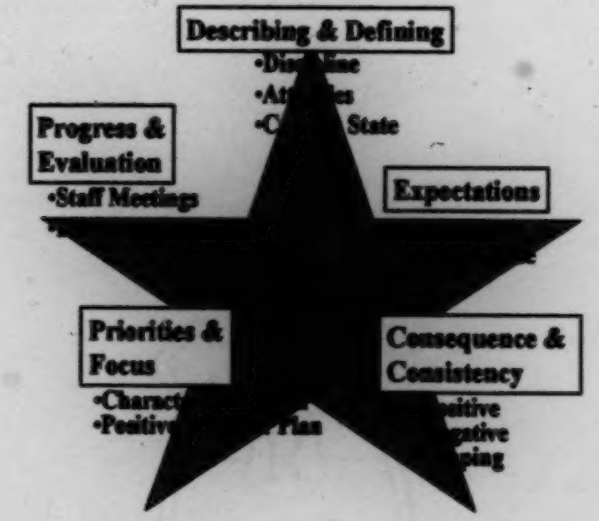
Figure 5.2


Achievement Data
•Sta rdized Results
•L Developed
•I Measures
Progress &Evaluation
•Critical
•Ho
•Ongoing
Data Analysis
Improvement
rprises
Priorities & Focus
•Who, What, W
•When, Why,
Research
rrent
lative
licable

2. **Student Discipline (Figure 5.3)**

Student conduct and discipline are often highlighted as an area needing improvement in many schools. It is important to examine everyone's attitudes and beliefs about discipline as these attitudes and beliefs will lead to how student discipline is perceived and handled at the classroom and school-wide levels. Honesty and a genuine examination of the issues in the conversations with students, parents and staff are important in understanding this area. Once areas of need are identified, then a plan based on identified priorities can be established. Part of the plan should also include identifying "who, what, why and how".

Figure 5.3


Describing & Defining
•Dis line
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Progress & Evaluation
•Staff Meetings
Expectations
Priorities & Focus
•Charact
•Positiv Plan
Consequence & Consistency
sitive
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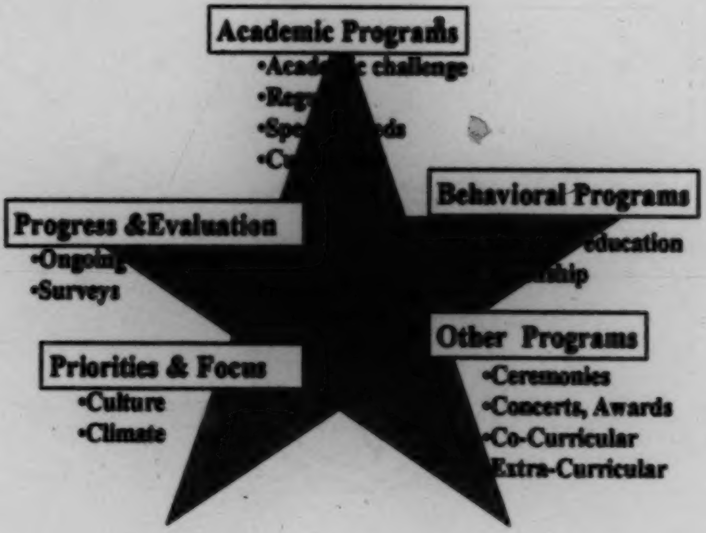
3. Programs, Traditions and Celebrations (Figure 5.4)

Programs for students, traditions, celebrations and activities are often considered key areas for building school culture. In conversations with all stakeholders, staff and principals need to examine how each program area reflects the vision for the school, identify areas for change and establish a plan that can be monitored and/or evaluated. Some items for discussion may be well-established traditions, but should still be examined in light of the vision and the changing needs of the school. Resistance from staff, students and/or parents can become an issue in regard to some of these traditions and practices. Traditions can be good things; but, when they do not reflect the vision, they need to be evaluated. Each principal in this study spoke about the importance of programs, traditions and celebrations in their schools. They thought this was a critical area in terms of building positive school culture. This is also an area where recognition and celebration can reinforce the vision of the school.

Figure 5.4

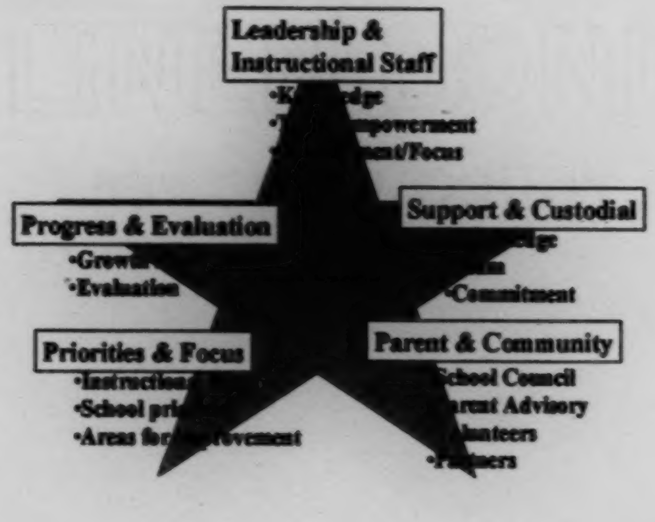

Academic Programs
•Acad c challenge
•Reg
•Spe ds
•C
Behavioral Programs
education
hip
Progress &Evaluation
•Ongoin
•Surveys
Other Programs
•Ceremonies
•Concerts, Awards
•Co-Curricular
Extra-Curricular
Priorities & Focus
•Culture
•Climate

4. Human Resources (Figure 5.5)

Principals identified staffing as a critical area when bringing about change. They found that some staff embraced the changes once they heard the rationale and were part of the process of identifying what needed to be changed. Others appeared to be neutral for a period of time until they could decide to accept or reject the change. Some staff rejected the changes from the outset, making comments such as "The way we used to do this…" or "We've always done it this way…and it's worked, why should we change?" For the most part, principals decided to work with those who supported the change and to bring along some in the middle group. In the group that rejected the changes, each principal found a few staff who could be convinced to change and others who refused and were detrimental to the change process. Those people who were detrimental to the process were given assistance in finding a place where they would be happier. This was not seen by the principals as a negative thing. In fact, they advocated for these individuals and helped find them places that better fit their beliefs.

Other human resources available to principals were the members of the School Council, the parent advisory groups, volunteers and community partners. Working with human resources really required the principals to spend time with people in building relationships of trust and respect. Empowering people, involving people in decision-making and the use of inclusive language were all strategies that principals used in working with human resources connected with their schools. Principals agreed this was a time-consuming part of their job as people needed to be heard and relationships needed to be nurtured.

Figure 5.5

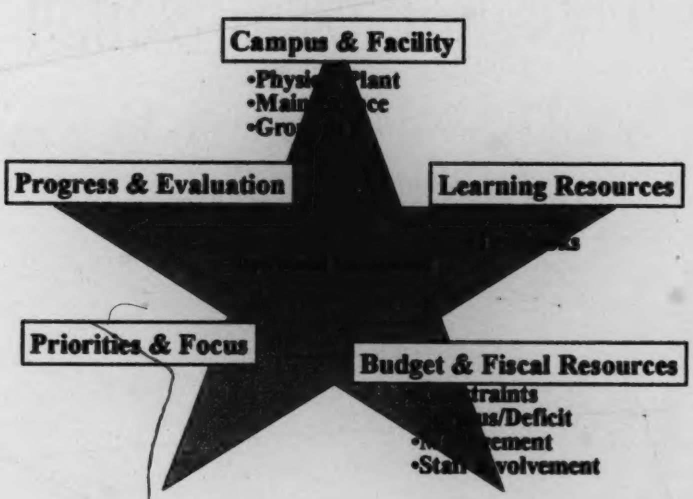

Leadership & Instructional Staff
•K edge
•T mpowerment
• ment/Focus
Support & Custodial
• edge
• m
•Commitment
Parent & Community
• chool Council
• arent Advisory
• lunteers
•P ers
Priorities & Focus
•Instruction
•School pri
•Areas for provement
Progress & Evaluation
•Grow
•Evaluation

5. Operational Management (Figure 5.6)

The principals agreed that the physical environment was absolutely critical to the implementation of the school vision. An important factor for each principal was the cleanliness of their schools. Their schools had to be free of graffiti, broken windows or filthy hallways and classrooms. They felt that students would not respect the facilities if everyone did not do their part in creating and maintaining a clean and attractive environment. This was an area where immediate and obvious changes could be made fairly quickly and, when changed for the better, were usually supported by everyone.

In managing finances, each principal recognized the need for establishing priorities through conversations with stakeholders. Finding ways to support the various priorities if they required extra resources, either financial or human, often required principals to be creative and to think outside the box. Many found that involving members of the parent or outside community helped.

Figure 5.6



A Beginning

A significant strategy and important starting place for principals to use in creating change and building culture was to ask questions that engaged people in conversation. These questions could be related to each of the five areas discussed previously and can be used to begin conversations on how people view the current reality of the school. Each principal in this study began by examining data, asking questions and having conversations. They collected data and information by conversing, observing, and listening. They shared this data and information with their staff, students and parents. They also examined research in salient areas to assist in their analysis.

For example, principals collected information in regard to student conduct and behavior. Staff members were asked to examine their discipline practices and explain their attitudes toward discipline. Principals spent time discussing and observing the 'culture' that was established regarding student conduct and discipline. Were students expected to be on time? How were students and staff expected to treat one another? Questions were asked, conversations took place and information was collected. Priorities were then established along with a monitoring plan.

One tool that principals might use to collect some of the information they need is presented in Figure 5.7. Three principals agreed to use this tool at the beginning of their 2004 school year and provided some feedback as to its usefulness. They found that it worked as an initial ice-breaker and provided staff with a method (anonymously, if they wished), to share their ideas about the school. They thought it was an open-ended way for staff to share ideas and it provided principals a window into the thinking of their staff. It was also a way to identify an area that staff thought needed changing. The feedback I received also indicated that the chart is a fairly easy way to collect some initial data and to provide staff with an opportunity to communicate some of their ideas and concerns for change. As one principal indicated, "it's a place to begin some dialogue." It was also something that could be used each year as it did not require a lot of work.

Once data and information are collected from all five areas, principals can present the amalgamated data for further discussion. Principals found it was important to challenge themselves and their staff to examine their beliefs and attitudes. Each principal thought honesty and truthfulness were important in conversations about all aspects of their schools. They wanted as open a conversation and dialogue as possible because it was, for each of them, the place to begin.

Figure 5.7

SCHOOL CULTURE

Please fill this form out to the best of your ability reflecting XXXXXX School as a whole. This information is confidential and will help me get to know how people view the various aspects of their school. There is no need for you to sign the form, however, if you wish to sign it, please do so. I really appreciate you taking the time to do this and value your input. If you have any questions or concerns please let me know.

Please check the appropriate box. A five-star rating is the highest.	☆1	☆2	☆3	☆4	☆5
Student Achievement (performance, competency, achievement)					
Student Discipline (attitudes, expectations, consequences)					
Programs, Traditions, Celebrations (ceremonies, traditions, awards, extra-curricular, etc)					
Human Resources (teaching, support, custodial, parent, community, etc)					
Operational Management (facility, learning resources, budget, etc.)					

Areas of Strength

Areas in Need of Improvement

Additional Comments

Conclusion 2: The Keys to Building Positive School Culture

Language

In building school culture the tools that were part of the success experienced by principals were the language they used and the relationships they built as they moved their work forward (Figure 5.8). It is often said that communication is key in ensuring that people work together as a team. What is really key in the communication, I believe, is the language that is used in that communication. Language can invite or dis-invite, it can be critical or it can be encouraging, it can foster critical thinking or it can foster complaining, it can be inclusive or alienating.

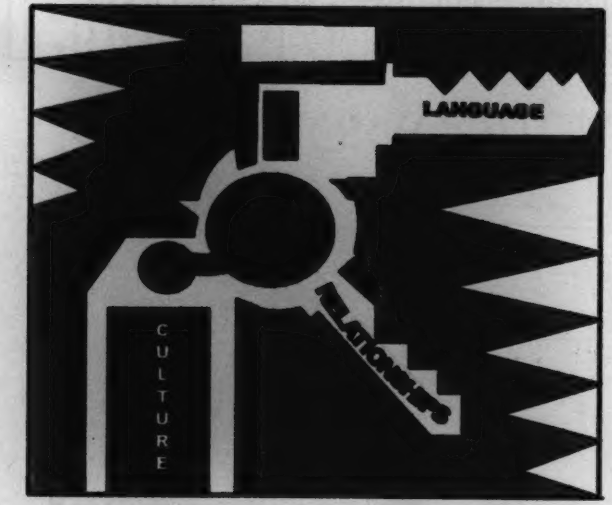
The language these principals used in questioning and challenging themselves and their staff members, the language used in the many conversations and daily interactions and the language used in voicing the vision were critical to how successful they were in creating a school culture that was enhancing and encouraging. Language was key to building a model of shared leadership and inclusion. The principals frequently used 'we' language in referencing the work in their schools. They used language that demonstrated their authenticity and their commitment to making their schools positive places for learning for both students and staff. They invited people to share their views, their criticisms and their ideas. They spent time listening in order to understand what people believed and how they thought. Their language showed people that they cared and were deeply committed to the work they were doing.

Relationships

Language was also important in the development of relationships with members of the team. When people felt their ideas and thoughts were heard and they were treated and expected to behave as professionals, they responded in kind. Even when discussing individuals who were described as teachers with difficulties, the language each principal used was respectful as was the concern for the individual. Dealing with staff members who were not performing their duties or who were deliberately sabotaging the work was something that none of the principals took pride in doing. They did it because they felt it had to be done. Efforts were made to provide assistance and professional development in the hope these staff members would improve their performance.

Every principal recognized the need to nurture people, to encourage people and to build relationships of trust and integrity. The language they used was the language of hope, the language of optimism and the language of team.

Figure 5.8



Conclusion 3: How Do Principals Build Positive School Culture?

Building school culture is a complex and multi-dimensional process that requires complex and multi-dimensional study and analysis. As was indicated earlier, there is not a lot of information in the research about the 'how' of this process. This study was an attempt to better understand some of that 'how' through the stories of six principals who had made what their superintendents' considered to be great progress in building schools with positive cultures. In my analysis of their stories, I have attempted to cull some of the 'how'. I recognize there were many common strategies, but there were some that were as unique as the individuals. In conclusion, I would answer the 'how' by saying that these principals did some or all of the following:

1. They used a problem-solving approach and believed that many minds were better than one in finding solutions or resolutions.
2. They recognized the complexity of what they were doing and selectively targeted certain priorities at certain times as they knew it could not all get done at once.
3. They chose their battles.
4. They inspired others to join them and were hopeful and optimistic.
5. They constantly asked questions, asked for feedback and examined beliefs—their own as well as others.
6. They declared what they stood for and asked others to do the same.
7. They paid attention, were vigilant and mindful of people, the language they used and the relationships in their buildings.

8. They constantly examined their schools and held many conversations about what they were doing and how they were doing it.
9. They involved all the stakeholders and listened actively and attentively.
10. They showed courage by asking tough questions and by not running from criticism.
11. They distributed the leadership throughout the school by using others who were seen as leaders or by hiring who they needed to get the job done.
12. They found out what was needed and, if it was critical to the vision, they found the resources to fill the needs.
13. They were creative and could think outside the box.
14. They modeled professionalism, commitment and humanness.
15. They protected what and who needed to be protected.
16. They rewarded and acknowledged those who did the work.
17. They were strong and committed in their mission, so much so, that it became, for many of them, their life.
18. They were 'hooked', or as one principal described, became positively addicted to the synergy of the process.
19. They spent hundreds of hours above and beyond the regular work day, week and year.
20. They believed what they were doing was important.

Recommendations for Practice and Theory

1. Conclusion 1 described a framework for principals to use as a tool in guiding their work in developing school culture. It is recommended that principal education programs examine the issues of school culture and how it is established and/or changed. Being a principal in today's world is a complex, multi-dimensional task. It is very different from teaching. Individuals who have been fortunate to work with leaders who include them in the leadership of the school have an advantage, I believe, over those who have not had that experience. Assistant principal positions must be viewed as opportunities for potential administrators to experience leadership. Assistant principals need to be involved in all leadership aspects of the school and not just delegated to do clerical tasks such as timetabling, etc.
2. Conclusion 2 discussed the importance of language and relationships in the work that principals do in building school culture. Leadership programs in districts and post-secondary institutions should provide individuals an opportunity to examine their beliefs and their 'language' as they prepare themselves for leadership roles. Opportunities to observe and discourse with principals should also be a key component of any leadership education program.
3. Conclusion 3 described some of the 'how' in the question "How do principals build positive school cultures?" Some of the 'how' is learned by experience. If it was possible to include a leadership practicum or internship program as part of leadership education within a district or post-secondary institution,

future leaders would be provided an opportunity to, not only explore the theoretical aspects of building school culture, but the 'lived experience' as well. This would also, I believe, provide individuals an opportunity to explore whether leadership is a career they wish to pursue.

Recommendations for Theory and Further Research

1. Based on how much extra time these principals spent in building the cultures in their schools, it might be interesting to explore if this is necessary. Each principal indicated that it was all-consuming work that was self-reinforcing and energizing; however, if leadership candidates are examining the possibility of becoming principals will they be hesitant when they see the amount of time that some of the work takes?
2. It is also important, I think, to examine why fewer people are choosing to become administrators in our schools. Is it the nature of the work? Is it the stress? Is it that they see educators in general as not receiving respect and support from the community? It would be interesting to examine the issues for the supposed decline in applicants.
3. Another area for future research and theory is to examine how principals can help each other in the work they do. The work principals do often isolates them from their teaching staff as well as their colleagues. Is there some way that this can be changed?
4. Certainly one question that is often asked in today's schools is "Does the work that we do as principals have to be so complex?" Some have

explained the added complexities with the onset of site-based decision making, others have explained it in terms of the complexities of our society. But, what is making the work of principals so complex?

5. Another question to be further researched is should the role of the school principal be one of culture builder or should a principal just be an instructional leader paying more attention to the teaching and learning and less attention to the 'other' aspects of the school that have been described in the literature as impacting or creating culture?
6. Given the complexity and seeming isolation of the work principals do, how do we prevent burnout? What can principals do to maintain balance in their lives when the demands of the job seem to be increasing all the time?
7. What other models of schooling and leadership should we be examining or researching in light of today's increasing globalization? Are there other ways of schooling children for tomorrow?
8. With the increasing demands and the increasing social issues we are facing in our schools today (i.e. violence with weapons), should the professional associations for teachers be examining whether teaching and all its related careers such as administration, be pensioned at twenty-five years like the police or fire prevention service? Is it harder to do the work today? What will the future bring?

Reflections

This research concluded that principals were the main "stewards" of what was involved in building culture. The success of their endeavors was due to the relationships they built and the language they used in building those relationships. Principals had to be "mindful" of their language and of the relationships in their daily interactions. This was described, by some, as their main work.

Principals were also viewed as stewards for the vision of the school. Having a vision or "dream" was seen as critical to the development of the culture of the school. This vision had to be created with involvement from all stakeholders and had to be based on values that were supported by everyone.

The participants were most gracious and forthcoming in their interviews, verifications and follow-up checks. The richness of their reflections and experiences and the detail of their stories were critical to this research. The depth of the principals' reflections; and the openness and candidness in the sharing of their experiences and stories, resulted in a deeper understanding regarding the question of how principals build school culture. The reader may find these stories interesting, insightful and helpful as well.

I was impressed with the participants' abilities to manage the changes that took place in their schools. Their willingness to discuss all aspects of their work; including their mistakes, and the changes they had made in their own practice since moving to other schools, impressed me as well. This truly was a conversation about professional practice that has impacted my own practice. I spend more time being "mindful", listening with openness and monitoring my own language.

I was impressed and inspired by the questions that were asked by my committee members. They challenged me to keep questioning and reflecting on my research and my own professional practice. I learned that asking critical questions, as well as widening the members for the conversation, can bring about a deeper conversation which, in turn, brings more questions, and so on. Engaging in conversations about "education" and what it means will, I hope, be an ongoing discourse. I also hope that attention will be given to "culture" in schools as this impacts what happens for children. I am thankful for the insights and learning I have experienced in this journey.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is school culture and how critical is it in a school? Why?
2. What is required for a school to have a positive school culture?
3. Describe the culture of your school.
4. How did this culture come to be? What role did you play as a principal in creating this culture and what strategies, steps, actions did you take in its development?
5. What roadblocks did you face? How did you deal with these roadblocks?
6. What factors contributed to your success? What leadership strengths contributed to your success?
7. What have you learned and what would you do differently if given it to do over?
8. What leadership qualities do you think principals need the most to build schools with positive school cultures today?
9. How did you involve parents, staff, students and community in developing the culture of your school.
10. Can anybody do what you did? What would they need to do it?
11. What inspires you and what motivates you?
12. What is your personal view on education and how does it translate into the culture of your school?
13. If you were to pick one single factor that would most influence the culture of a school, what would that be?
14. What events and circumstances in a typical school day make you feel good and what make you feel bad? What keeps you going when times get tough?
15. How much time do you spend in your school in a given week? Does it require a lot of extra time for you, your staff and others to build the right climate? What would your school be like if these extra efforts were not made?

Appendix B

Contact Letter—Superintendent

Participant Contact Letter

Dear Superintendent:

I am currently enrolled in a doctoral program in secondary education at the University of Alberta. It is my intent to commence research associated with building positive school culture—specifically from a principal's perspective. As with all research, those conducting it must seek participants to provide data. I would like to work with principals from your district who you would endorse as individuals who have schools with positive school cultures. If possible, I would ask you to consider the enclosed elements that have been identified in research as present in schools with positive cultures. I would also ask that you consider the information that you receive from achievement results, enrolment statistics, district staff, student and parent surveys and your own observations in your analysis. At your convenience, I would request a meeting with you for approximately thirty minutes to discuss your considerations. Several principals have initially agreed to assist with my research and I would be interested in discussing the possibility of using them in my research as well, pending your endorsement and approval.

The purpose of this study is to examine from a principal's perspective how they build such positive school cultures. I am also interested in examining whether enough common strategies are identified to develop a model for aspiring principals to use when they first begin work in a school. As the literature indicates, a school's culture greatly impacts student and staff performance and well-being and parent satisfaction with the school. I would like to interview six school principals who have been principals in schools kindergarten through grade twelve. By interviewing across divisions, it will be interesting to see if there are any discernible differences between schools from elementary through high school. This is a qualitative study where I will utilize semi-structured interviews to collect data. The interviews will vary in length depending on the issues, topics and views that emerge during the initial interview. The initial interview will last approximately one hour and will be recorded to allow for transcription of the interview and subsequent analysis of data. Second and possibly third interviews will be arranged with each individual depending on the need for clarification. All interviews will be at the participants' convenience.

All research will be governed by the Ethics of Research standard developed by the University of Alberta. Participants are guaranteed confidentially and any comments from the interview data that are used in the dissertation will be assigned a pseudonym. Participants may decide at any time to opt out of the study. Enclosed for your information is a copy of the ethics review application and the signed approval.

...2

I would like to begin interviewing participants in November 2002 and would make arrangements to do so at their convenience. Should participants determine after examining the transcribed data that any information they have shared might be potentially damaging, they may exercise the right to have any reference to that information deleted from the data analysis and the reporting of the data. A signed guarantee of confidentiality will be provided for each participant. An executive summary of the final dissertation will be provided to you and each participant if so requested.

I am requesting your permission to conduct research with principals in Edmonton Public Schools and to formally approach identified principals to assist with my study.

I sincerely hope that you approve and endorse this study and appreciate your consideration of this proposal.

Yours truly,

Wilma Bayko
EdD Provisional Candidate
Secondary Education
University of Alberta

Appendix C

Elements of Positive, Successful School Culture

ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE, SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL CULTURES

There are many definitions and conceptions of culture. Some define it as a web of significance in which we live (Geertz, 1973) others as the way in which things are done here (Bower, 1966) and still others define it as the shared beliefs and values that bring a community together (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). A more widely recognized definition comes from Schein (1985): culture is "a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems…that have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 9). In schools these patterns are developed and influenced by administration both internal and external, by staff, by students, by parents and by the community at large. They do not develop or change overnight.

"School cultures are complex webs of traditions and rituals that have been built up over time as teachers, students, parents and administrators work together and deal with crises and accomplishments" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 4). "…culture is extremely powerful. This ephemeral, taken-for-granted aspect of schools, too often overlooked or ignored, is actually one of the most significant features of any educational enterprise. Culture influences everything that goes on in schools: how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, the practice of instruction, and the emphasis given student and faculty learning" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28).

Schools with positive school cultures often differ in their individual parts, however, the following general characteristics have been identified as being present in schools with positive cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 116)

- A mission focused on student and teacher learning
- A rich sense of history and purpose
- Core values of collegiality, performance, and improvement that engender quality, achievement, and learning for everyone
- Positive beliefs and assumptions about the potential of students and staff to learn and grow
- A strong professional community that uses knowledge, experience and research to improve practice
- An informal network that fosters positive communication flow
- Shared leadership that balances continuity and improvement

- **Rituals and ceremonies that reinforce core cultural values**
- **Stories that celebrate successes and recognize heroines and heroes**
- **A physical environment that symbolizes joy and pride**
- **A widely shared sense of respect and caring for everyone**

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Appendix D

Contact Letter—Principal

Participant Contact Letter

Dear Principal:

I am currently enrolled in a doctoral program in secondary education at the University of Alberta. It is my intent to commence research associated with building positive school culture and climate—specifically from a principal's perspective. As with all research, those conducting it must seek participants to provide data. I would like to work with principals who have been endorsed by their superintendents as individuals who have or had schools with positive school cultures.

The purpose of the study is to examine from a principal's perspective how you build such positive school cultures. I am also interested in whether enough common elements are identified from the research to develop a model for aspiring principals to use when they first begin work in a school. As you know and as the literature indicates, a school's culture greatly impacts student and staff performance and well-being and parent satisfaction with the school. I would like to interview six participants who have been principals in schools kindergarten through grade twelve to also see, among other things, if there are any discernible differences between schools from elementary through high school. As this is a qualitative study, I propose to use semi-structured interviews as the method to collect data. The interviews will vary in length depending on the issues, topics and views that emerge during the initial interview. The initial interview will last approximately one hour and will be recorded to allow for transcription of the interview and subsequent analysis of data. Second and possibly third interviews will be arranged with you depending on the need for clarification. All interviews will be at your convenience.

All research will be governed by the Ethics of Research standard developed by the University of Alberta. You are guaranteed confidentially and any comments from the interview data that are used in the dissertation will be assigned a pseudonym. Should you agree to participate, you may decide at any time to opt out of the study. Enclosed for your information is a copy of the ethics review application and the signed approval.

I would like to begin interviewing in mid to late January 2003 and would make arrangements to do so at your convenience. Should you determine after examining the transcribed data that any information you have shared might be potentially damaging, you may exercise the right to have any reference to that information deleted from the data analysis and the reporting of the data. A signed guarantee of confidentiality will be provided for you. An executive summary of the final dissertation will be provided to you if so requested. The data from this research will be used to complete my doctoral studies and may be used in future presentations or in a journal article. Confidentiality will be maintained in all uses of the data collected in this research..

I sincerely hope that you agree to participate in this study and appreciate your assistance.

Yours truly,

Wilma Bayko
EdD Provisional Candidate
Secondary Education
University of Alberta

Please sign below and return this letter if you are willing to participate in this study.

Name ______________________________

Convenient date for an interview (mid to late January 2003) ____________________

Appendix E

Consent to Participate

Letter of Intent to Participate in Doctoral Research

To: Wilma Bayko

Please be advised that I, ________________________________do hereby agree to participate in your Doctoral Research Study entitled *Building Positive School Culture and Climate—The Principal's Journey*. This agreement is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

That the research is to be conducted as per the Ethics of Research as developed by the University of Alberta as per the material found within the approved Ethics Review Application which has been included with your letter of request. Specifically, the following points are included in this approval:

- **As a participant, I am guaranteed of confidentiality and any comments which are excerpted from the interview data for use in the Dissertation will be attributed to a pseudonym and the connection of such a pseudonym to me will be known only to myself and the researcher.**
- **I may at any time, without consequences, decide to opt out of the study despite my initial agreement to participate;**
- **Arrangements for interviews can be made to suit my schedule and commitments.**
- **Should I determine, after examination and reflection of transcribed data, that information which has been described might be potentially damaging, I may exercise**

the right to have any reference to the information deleted from the data analysis and the reporting of the data;

- Approval is given subject to a signed guarantee of confidentiality noted at the bottom of this letter;

- An executive summary of the final dissertation will be provided to me in recognition of my assistance in this research study if so requested;

- The interviews will be tape recorded to facilitate transcription and data analysis;

- Copies of the transcribed data will be provided to me as soon as possible after the conclusion of the first interview and if applicable, after subsequent interviews;

Date: ______________________________

Signed: ____________________________

Appendix F

Guarantee of Confidentiality

Guarantee of Confidentiality

I, Wilma Bayko, guarantee confidentiality to ______________________________

With respect to interview data associated with a Doctoral Dissertation entitled *Building Positive School Culture and Climate—The Principal's Journey* and that no reference will be made to location or jurisdiction in the attribution of excerpted responses. It is further guaranteed that any comments excerpted from the interviews will be assigned a pseudonym and that the participant reserves the final right to approve the inclusion of excerpted data from the Doctoral Dissertation.

Date: ____

Signed: ____

Appendix G

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

VI. Research Assistant/Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

(revised June 11 02)

Project title:

I, ______________________________, the *Research Assistant/Transcriber*, agree to:

1. **keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.**
2. **keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.**
3. **return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.**
4. **after consulting with the *Researcher(s)*, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).**

Research Assistant/Transcriber

____________________	____________________	____________________
(print name)	**(signature)**	**(date)**

Researcher(s)

____________________	____________________	____________________
(print name)	**(signature)**	**(date)**